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16

Lazy Dungeon Master





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Dungeon Core Number 89

HAKU

Keima and Rokuko's Daughter

SOTO

"OH MY MY
THAT TICKLES."

"HEY, SOTO! DON'T
RUB YOUR CHEEKS
AGAINST THE BITS
OF HER THIGHS
EXPOSED BY THE
SLIT OF HER
DRESS!"

"HI AGAIN, AUNTIE!"





Church of Light's High Priestess

ALCA

Undead

Core 10

Dog Loli (in Disguise)

TOI

CONTENTS

Prologue

Side Chapter
The Battle of the Dog-Eared Loli Maids

Chapter 1

Side Chapter
Narikin and Rokufa's Time Off

Side Chapter
Soto's Tea Party

Chapter 2

Side Chapter
The High Priestess Alca Puts the Pieces Together

Side Chapter
Soto Killing Time

Chapter 3

Epilogue



Prologue

Why does life hate me?

We had just finished a big job in Daide, but now Haku was ordering us to go investigate the Holy Kingdom. And I mean, maybe that could be fine on its own, but on top of that she was dumping a troublemaker on us and telling us to bring her along. Curse you, Haku.

And so, with Leona's granddaughter and walking time bomb, Toi, added to our party, we returned to Goren without any incidents occurring along the way.

"Okay, first up is figuring out how to deal with Toi," I said to myself, electing to gather all of the dungeon's higher-ups in my office to discuss matters.

"...and that's how we ended up with this pain in the neck," I said.

"I am called Toi. It is a pleasure to meet you, everyone," Toi said with a bow of her head. If not for the meaningful smile she had inherited from Leona, she would have looked like Niku's identical twin. Especially since she was wearing the inn's uniform (a maid outfit) as well; if she had fallen silent with a blank expression, the only way to tell them apart would have been to look for a collar on their necks.

"Nice to meet you. I am Rei."

"Wooooow, you look just like Nikuuu. Oh, I'm Neruneeeh."

"I am Kinue. Ahem... Master, Rokuko. Where will she be staying?"

Once introductions were finished, we got right into discussing how to deal with her.

"Personally, I would be fine with staying in a tiny dog house built beside the inn," Toi suggested.

"That is a brilliant idea, Master. A whipped dog like her is not fit to stay inside the house," Niku agreed.

...I also don't want a ticking time bomb in the house, but naturally, we'd get a bad reputation if we forced a little girl to sleep in a dog house right outside the inn.

"Oh, oh, oh! I know!" Soto exclaimed. "I'll keep her in my dungeon! I can charge her socks for rent!"

"That's nice, Soto. Now, stop talking. Rokuko, your thoughts?" I asked.

"Can't we just let her stay in the inn? We could even give her some shifts working as a maid. Kinue, there're still spare rooms, aren't there?"

"Indeed. I will have one prepared at once."

"Okay, it's settled. Chop chop."

And so, Rokuko settled the matter in an instant.

I mean, this is fine with me. Not like there's anywhere else for her. There's the church, but the Succubi there are literally Leona's former henchmen. Don't really want to put them all together. The best option is the inn's employee dorm, just like Rokuko said.

...Naturally, we had a lot of secrets we were keeping even from Haku here. It was a secret that Soto's {Storage} dungeon connected to everywhere, and all our Golem stuff was top secret as well.

"Incidentally, Keima," Toi began. "What exactly is a maid expected to do here? Make no mistake, I am utterly confident in being able to do any conceivable duty expected of a maid, but I would like to know just out of curiosity."

"Sitting at the inn's front desk and serving food in the cafeteria, mainly."

"Excuse me?"

"Sitting at the inn's front desk and serving food in the cafeteria, mainly."

"...You would use me for such trifling matters? You must not realize the extent of my abilities."

Sorry, but I just don't have anything else for you to do. The dungeon's working fine as it is. I was trying to dump you on Haku since we didn't really want you

here to begin with.

“I would prefer a job that better makes use of a list of specific and highly trained skills.”

“Okay, shoot. What can you do?”

“Assassination, torture, kidnapping, information manipulation, investigation, stirring discontent, stealing goods, and targeted search-and-destroy missions.”

Are you a friggin’ ninja? Though...now that I think about it, that really is a useful set of specific and highly trained skills.

“Search and destroy! I like that. Actually... Keima! Let’s talk about Haku’s mission, too. It’ll be easy since everyone’s already here, no?” Rokuko asked.

“Master, was there another job from Haku?” Rei asked.

“...Unfortunately. Seems like we gotta find the plant making artificial dungeons in the Holy Kingdom and destroy it.”

It was hard to imagine a more annoying job. We’d need to leave our dungeon on its own again, and we risked dying there. *Jeez, just let me go home and sleep already.*

“...Lord Keima. Should I be allowed to hear this?” Toi asked.

“Well, Haku brought it up in front of you, so yeah. That was probably her signaling that we should use you to solve this in the first place. This kind of thing is your specialty, no?”

“I see. In that case, I shall say my piece without hesitation.”

And so, we discussed the job Haku had given us with Toi present.

“Guess I’m gonna have to go again, huh...?”

“Fear not, Master! I shall protect the dungeon in your absence!” Rei exclaimed, full of confidence, with Neruneh and Kinue nodding in support.

Yeah, they handled things well when we were in Daide, so I’m sure the dungeon will be fine.

“No way, Rei. That’s not it, girl. You really don’t get Master at all, like, seriously.”

“Hrm? What do you mean, Ichika?”

“Master just finished a big job, y’know. So he’s gonna want to chill at home. Am I right?” Ichika winked at me.

“Whoa, yeah. Can you read minds or something, Ichika?”

“Ahaha! ’Course not! Let’s just say I’ve got sharp eyes. I can read you like a book, Master! You’ve got no secrets from me! Teehee.”

Those *were* pretty sharp eyes. I had to kneel before Ichika’s might. She really would be the perfect maid if not for her crippling gambling addiction.

“Couldn’t we just have Toi go and handle it?” Rokuko asked. “That is your specialty, right?”

“Rokuko. I mean... It *is* my specialty, but would you truly trust me to do it alone?”

No. Absolutely not. And even if we did send Toi, it would be unthinkable to send her alone. She would need someone to keep an eye on her.

“It would be better for us to go than such a new recruit,” Rei said. “Just say the word, Master.”

“Nah. I mean, none of you three are exactly search-and-destroy specialists.”

Rei had zero attack power, Kinue was a maid, and Neruneh was a researcher. Ichika was an average adventurer, and while Niku was strong, she wasn’t exactly a search-and-destroy specialist. Rokuko and Soto were out of the question.

“Oooh, in that caaase, why not summon a new monsteer and have them keep an eye on the newbieeee?” Neruneh suggested.

“But this is a direct request from Lady Haku, no? I would be concerned about trusting it all to a new person.”

Neruneh’s idea had seemed genius at first, but Kinue’s concerns made sense. This *was* a job from Haku, and it would probably be too much for a newbie to handle alone. Even if their only job was to look after Toi, the only thing Toi would listen to was my own direct instructions.

But just as I was thinking I would indeed have to go again, Toi suddenly raised her hand.

“I may have an idea that will neatly solve all of these problems. May I speak?” Toi asked. All eyes gathered on her.

“...Alright, spit it out. We’re listening.”

“Very well. There is a way to leave your home base, this village, without truly leaving. I imagine that you and Lady Rokuko in all your wisdom are aware of the method already but have simply not noticed it can be used here.”

“Leave without truly leaving, huh? Elaborate.”

“It is simple. You need only possess someone and walk in their flesh,” Toi said, her smile never faltering.

“Possessing someone else...? In short, since I can leave in the other person’s body, I can stay here and sleep in my own body. Do I have that right?”

“Indeed! You are as insightful as I have come to expect, Lord Keima. It is ideal to erase the mind from a healthy body, as they will then provide no resistance. And subsequently, a Holy Kingdom native would be ideal for invading the Holy Kingdom, but do you have any candidates in mind?”

Why, indeed I did. There was an assassin sent from the Holy Kingdom still chained up in the hidden jail at the bottom of our well. But there was no reason to tell Toi about that. I didn’t want her to know any potential weak points of ours.

“No one perfect comes to mind. Should we search for a slave from the Holy Kingdom?” I asked.

“Oh no, no, if you do not have one, we need merely pose as travelers. As you are a Dungeon Master, you can simply prepare a monster, then perform humanification.”

Possessing a monster would be more convenient in that I could bring my consciousness back and sleep in my own body while letting the monster handle things on its own. Not to mention, since possession was a dungeon function, it was even safer than using the {Possess} skill.

A human transformation would be absolutely necessary, though. After all, the Holy Kingdom was a land of human supremacists who wanted to fuck dungeons up, so they were pretty terrible to other races—beastkin in particular. If someone who looked like a monster walked in there and died, they'd have only themselves to blame. Resembling a human was just the most basic step necessary for not being exposed at the border.

“Though if you do, by chance, have an assassin from the Holy Kingdom, using them would be advantageous in that you could use their connections to enter. There is no use crying over what we do not have, however.”

Oh yeah, that would be pretty useful... Should I admit it?

“Don't you have any connections, Toi? I thought infiltrations like this were one of your specialties. Surely you have one or two ways to infiltrate the Holy Kingdom,” Rokuko said.

“Aaah, a wise observation indeed! I would expect nothing less from the genius Lady Rokuko, an unparalleled mind the likes of which appears only once in a hundred years! You have seen right through me. Indeed, I have such connections. Therefore, we will be able to enter the Holy Kingdom without issue if I am to accompany you!”

“Oh my, you certainly know intelligence when you see it,” Rokuko said, smiling smugly at the praise. “I'll get monsters for Keima and me to possess, then. Get ready to leave.”

“As you wish, my lady. It shall take only three minutes,” Toi said with a polite bow.

...Wait, Rokuko already decided to bring her along? Not that I really care, I guess. We'll be safe either way. It's obvious that Toi could be setting a trap somehow, but with Rokuko and us just possessing bodies, we would be safely here in the Core Room throughout.

Then, Toi looked at Niku and scoffed. “See? This is the difference between this useless pup and me. We are simply made of different stuff. My stuff being the good stuff. Hers the bad.”

“Hmph. Barking won't change that you lost to me.”

“That was due to Lady Soto’s power, no? I would not have lost to you individually. And as demonstrated, I am the one who gave Lord Keima a useful suggestion.” Toi puffed out her chest proudly while giving Niku a scornful look.

Niku glared right back at her, not faltering in the least. “You are being cocky for a junior.”

“A junior? Well, I shall accept this title. Both it and my incompetent senior.”

“I am above you.”

“Oh my. Do you think a pup such as you could beat your own big sister?”

“I am the big sister.”

Sparks flew between the two of them.

“Master, Rokuko. If you’ll excuse me. This greenhorn needs to be taught her place.”

“Lord Keima, Lady Rokuko. I shall beat sense into this ignorant fool.”

“Er, well. Don’t hurt each other...?”

I reflexively nodded, overwhelmed by the intensity of the two tiny lolis.

“Master has given his permission. Come. I will teach you a lesson,” Niku said.

“Indeed, I shall stomp on that cheeky confidence of yours and crush it for good.”

“You can try.”

“A quip, is it? Ahahaha.”

And with that, Niku and Toi left the room while grappling with each other for dominance. I didn’t really follow it myself, but this kind of thing was probably important. They were dog beastkin, after all.

“Papa! I want to see who wins! Obviously, I’m supporting Niku.”

“Er, yeah, I guess?”

With that, I called an end to the meeting and told everyone to return to their duties.

Rokuko, who was patting Soto’s head as she opened her monitor, poked my

shoulder. “Keima, want to bet on who will win? The loser has to obey one order the other person says.”

“...Feels like it could go either way, really. But sure. No unreasonable orders.”

“Of course. Now, I’ll bet on Toi winning!”

“Guess I’ll go with Niku, then.”

Heh. Rokuko, you fool. Toi was a real pain in the neck back in Daide, but it’s a law of all realities that villains turn super weak once they join the party. My victory is guaranteed. I’m gonna go relax in the tub.

I mean, I’m joking about it being a law, but Niku has orichalcum supports that Toi doesn’t, and I have faith that our strongest fighter won’t lose that easily.

“Let’s watch, then,” Rokuko said, sitting next to me without opening her menu. A nice melon-like scent drifted by my nose.

“...Hey, are you wearing perfume or something? Like melon roll perfume.”

“Wow, what? I want some of that. Does it exist?”

“I dunno. Never mind.”

Also, bit late for me to be saying it, but is this one of those situations where even if Niku wins I won’t know what to ask for? Might be better for me to just up and lose.

“...Oopsies! I think I’m gonna watch this in my own room! Adieu!” Soto exclaimed, reading the mood and disappearing into her {Storage} dungeon. Adieu.

Side Chapter — The Battle of the Dog-Eared Loli Maids

Dog beastkin. Their proclivities leaned more toward the canine than not. Thus, they greatly valued hierarchies, and when a new member was introduced into their groups they firmly established superiors and inferiors. That held doubly true when said new member was similarly a dog beastkin.

In conclusion, now that Toi had come to the [Cave of Greed] to serve the same person as Niku, their highest priority was establishing dominance.

The two dog-eared, brown-skinned loli maids walked beside each other. There was the locally famous Niku, and the identical-looking Toi. The only thing that visually distinguished them were their expressions, or lack thereof, and their color (or lack thereof). A villager passing by the town chief residence when they were leaving did a double-take, slapped himself on the cheek, and shifted directions to the church so he could go pray (sleep) to recover from his apparent exhaustion.

“Let us settle this in the garden... No, the coliseum. I will be going all out,” Niku said.

“My my, are you actually deluding yourself into thinking you can beat me? How sad. Wittle girl, are you suuure you know where to go? Do you need mommy to guide you? Teeheehee!”

“...Is this the emotion known as annoyance?”

And so, Niku brought Toi into the dungeon. There was a guild receptionist there, but she knew Niku and let her in on sight, and Toi looked just like her so she was allowed through without question as well... Wait, two pups? They slipped in while the receptionist did a double take.

The two of them ran from the dungeon entrance to the coliseum. On the way there, Niku (being in the lead) intentionally activated an arrow trap to hit Toi with, but Toi did not falter at such blatant antagonism. She casually knocked the

arrows aside and kept up the pace with a smile, retaliating politely by tossing a Golem at Niku from behind, which she dodged. These spats continued until the two of them reached the coliseum, completely unharmed and breathing normally.

The coliseum was lit with magic light tools and overseen by an audience of Golems. Within the central arena, two dog-eared, brown-skinned loli maids faced each other. It was finally time for things to be settled.

“To introduce myself once again, I am Toi, your older sister.”

“I am Niku. Niku Kuroinu. I am Master’s dakimakura, and I am the older sister here,” Niku retorted, puffing out her chest and establishing dominance. Incidentally, the hierarchy of power within the [Cave of Greed] began with Keima (as far as Niku was concerned) and was followed by Rokuko, then Soto. Niku came next, then Ichika, then Rokuko’s pets, then the monster girls, then all the other underlings.

In this mental hierarchy she had formed, where would a newbie fit in? The absolute bottom, naturally! Toi belonged to the “other underlings” group, beneath even the monster girls! If she could crawl her way up through sheer grit and strength, then, well, Niku would permit her to join the monster girls. But at the start, she was at the bottom. That was just how things worked. At the very least, no way would Toi be above her.

“Dakimakura. My my, what a noble duty! Perhaps I shall join you in this noble endeavor? Ahaha, there is nothing a failure like you can do that I cannot. In fact, I believe I shall get your master addicted to my body and make your life easier by replacing you entirely,” Toi said, giggling with a hand on her mouth.

Toi wished to join Keima’s flock here (although Leona would forever be in a position of utmost authority within her hierarchy), and would not have complained about any position suitable for her strength; if he had assigned her to the monster girls, a fairly low but nonetheless administrative position, she would have been fine. However, all of that humility was scattered like dust in the wind before a failed experiment (Niku) being the dungeon’s number four in authority. Toi, with all her skills, found being beneath a useless failure intolerable, even if it was on Leona’s orders. Oh, but she had lost before? That

did not count; it hadn't been a one-on-one duel.

Toi considered herself highly competent after all she had done in Daide, and if one wished to contradict that, they only had the right after bringing a country to its knees as she had. Naturally, she would never recognize someone less skilled as her superior. She felt it was her right to either be given the rank of number three in the dungeon or alternatively knock the failed experiment down to the bottom so that she would be on top.

"Incidentally, pup. Just to be sure, how far may I beat you? I feel hesitant to completely eradicate Lord Keima's dakimakura without his permission."

"Let us not go so far that we trouble Master."

"That is fine with me. He did say not to harm each other."

Niku took two wooden training knives out of her {Storage}. Toi, in contrast, took out a wooden club from her {Storage}. It was large and octagonal, just thick enough to be gripped with two hands.

"Oh, you won't be using a knife?" Niku asked. She recalled that Toi had been using a wide, sizable knife before. She pointed it out so that Toi couldn't excuse her loss by saying she hadn't been using her best weaponry.

"I am skilled with the commonplace and efficient knife, but I have concluded that for the sake of practice, a club such as this would be ideal. It is easier to hold back when there is no blade," Toi said, implying that she was smarter than Niku and better at thinking ahead. "Shall we begin, then? Pup."

"Yes."

Thus began the duel between two dog-eared loli maids.

Niku moved first. She dashed into Toi's melee range and swung both her knives in an X. But Toi dodged it by slamming her club into the ground and jumping over her. She launched her foot down to stomp on Niku's head, but Niku rolled and kicked her own feet up to block it. They both stepped on each other's feet, and Toi jumped with her club to make some distance.

"Ahaha, now the clothes you so gratefully received from *Master* are dirty. Do you not feel ashamed?"

"I can just use {Purification}. It's not a problem."

"I see, I see."

Toi hummed with laughter. Magic circles appeared around her.

“■■,■■■■■■■■■■,■—{Fireball}.”

“Nn.”

Niku dodged the incoming fireballs by rolling to the side. Naturally, she didn't want her clothes to actually burn up.

“My myyy, if you don’t want your clothes to get burned, why not just take them off?”

“Don’t be dumb. I just have to not get hit.”

“I see, I see, you’re a big strong girl, aren’t yooou? Teeheehee!” Toi snapped her fingers. This time the fireballs appeared and launched themselves without any chant.

“Ah! Ngh!”

“Goodness. That was a simple double chant with a delayed chant, the oldest trick in any mage’s book. Ah, but I suppose Lady Soto defeated me before I could use any magic back then. Lady Soto, that is,” Toi repeated, emphasizing that she had only lost to Soto while Niku deflected the fireballs with her wooden blade.

"Not bad; not bad at all. How about this, then? ■■,■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■—
{Fireball}."

“...!”

Five fireballs appeared in the air, then flew toward Niku, one after another. Through flips and slashes, Niku managed to deal with all of them without even the hem of her skirt getting scorched. But Toi just cackled at the sight of her increasingly dirty clothing.

“That was a quintuple, five chants at once. You should be honored to have seen it. Could a failure like you manage to do the same? Is this not proof that I am superior?”

“...■■,■■■■■■■■■■—{Fireball}.”

And yet, Niku launched five fireballs at Toi. Toi let out a smug laugh as she watched them come.

“■■■■,■■■■,■■—{Ice Bolt}.”

Toi hit the five fireballs with bolts of ice. They canceled each other out.

“Not bad for a failed experiment. Ahaha, and as the successful end product, I shall quality check you even further!”

“I will make you understand that I am superior,” Niku replied, readying her wooden knife again and glaring up at Toi.

“I see that even a failure is at least passable in magic. But how about the physical arts?”

“I won’t lose.”

“Oh, but you don’t intend to win? I suppose a lack of ambition suits a failed pup.”

“I am simply staying on guard as is normal in a fight.”

Niku once again dashed toward Toi as the latter taunted her.

“Slow...!”

“Stupid.”

Toi reacted to Niku’s charge with a thrust of her club. Niku, however, knocked it aside with a spin and used the momentum to lead into powerful stabs. Knives raced toward Toi’s defenseless sides from both angles.

“{Leap}!”

Toi did an impossible leap out of her unfavorable position with a skill. It was the kind of skill that just boosted one’s jumping ability, but in practice it could be used for emergency situations like this.

“Oh, using skills? You certainly are weak.”

“Whew... Why not use things so convenient? Ignoring tools is the act of a fool. Oh, but I suppose you are a fool,” Toi said with a scoff. Niku looked at her with

cold eyes.

However, both of them were actually searching for openings in the other's stance.

“■■■■■■■■■■,■■■■■■■■■■,■■■■■■■■■■,■■■■—{Cursed Lance}.”

“■■,■■■■■■■■■■—{Fireball}.”

Niku knocked down the multiple pitch-black lances Toi created with five fireballs. The spells collided and exploded.

“Aha! Wait, is that the only spell you can use? I suppose as a failure, you don’t have many cards in your deck?”

"I am just keeping my cards hidden. Why should I show them to you?"

“Fair point. However, I need to display my cards to Lord Keima and indicate the full extent of my usefulness, so I will continue using them.

■,■,■■■■■,■■■■—{Cursed Pillar}.”

The ground split, and a pillar as thick as an adult man shot into the air. A purple mist exuded from it, making it highly unapproachable.

“Fear not; this has no killing power... I will simply be taking control of you through a curse. Ahaha, I know, I can have you dance a boorish stripper’s dance. Won’t that be fun?”

“■■■■. ■■■■■■■■■■,■■■■—{Summon Skeleton}.”

But Niku hit the pillar with soldiers of bone. The cursed Skeletons began dancing while thrusting their hips back and forth, but well, ignore that.

“Oh, summoning spells. I see you have the basics down.”

"I am going to start going all out," Niku said.

“Oh my. Then I suppose I will use a small, *very* small fraction of my full power.”

“Half of half of my power should do, then.”

“Hm? Then I will use half of half of half of my power,” Toi said.

"I will fight with half of half of half of half of my power," Niku retorted, glaring

at her. It was like an insult contest between two children... Though in reality they were children, so it really was that.

“In that case I will use... One thirty-secondth of my power,” Toi said after a brief pause to calculate it.

“Okay. I will use... One sixteenth of my power. Impressed? I can do two-digit division, too. Master taught me,” Niku said proudly, but Toi just snorted and barely contained a burst of laughter with a hand over her mouth.

“Ohoho... So you will use twice my power!”

“Nn? Twice is sixty-four. You’re being stupid now.”

“Ahahaha! These are fractions! Fractions, you ignorant puuup! Aaaha, you can’t even do math at the level of an elementary schooler, how sad!” Toi exclaimed, stumbling a bit on “elementary schooler” as if it wasn’t a phrase she was actually familiar with. Regardless, the larger the denominator of a fraction got, the smaller the number was, but unfortunately Niku had not yet learned about fractions or decimals. There wasn’t anything shameful about that, though, since most in this world made do with just addition and subtraction. There were more people who couldn’t do division and multiplication than who could.

“...I don’t understand what you mean, exactly, but I understand you are mocking me. I will punch you.”

“I am not mocking you, for it is the truth that you are indeed a foolish, ignorant pup, no? Ahahahaha!”

And so the battle began anew.

Niku thrust her wooden knives right at Toi’s face. She intended to slice off her smug grin, but naturally Toi dodged them and even launched a kick. Niku responded by kicking the club. Toi predicted that and tossed her club aside to grab Niku’s leg.

Toi abandoned the kicked-away club and dug her fingers into the back of Niku’s kneecap through her sock to hold her grip... but Niku didn’t collapse. Golem Assistance. This power that Toi did not know led to a result that was unpredictable for her.

It was only for a moment that she blinked in surprise. But that was more than enough time for Niku to bring her kicked-up leg down onto Toi's head.

"Guaaah!"

"Apologies, I meant to stop but didn't. On purpose."

"...Ngh. Not bad for a failure, pup," Toi spat.

"I have been training. By the way, it's late for this, but what exactly should my nickname for you be? Sore loser, maybe?"

"Of course not, for I am not a loser. What foul trickery did you use to land that blow?"

"The trick of having perfect control over one's body, and therefore not allowing one's opponent to exploit it."

"Tch, Demon King style!"

Toi was familiar with it. Demon King style aimed for a complete sense of oneness. A perfect control of form that could not be shaken by any other. Once mastered, one would have complete control over their body, heart, and even soul. This was half just a bluff from Niku, but it was true that Demon King style did have such a technique. Toi never would have thought that Niku had such mastery.

"I suppose this time I will truly take this seriously, then. Chaos style is one that consumes all. All that is available shall be used, even one's enemies. A thousand shifting changes, ten thousand flowing forms—{Kaleidoscope}!" Toi shouted, then split into four copies of herself.

"Impressed, foolish pup?" one asked.

"It is simply creating three illusory copies at once—"

"—But they all radiate the energy of real beings, no? That is the power of the technique."

"It was the style of some famous school of martial arts, but... I have forgotten their name. It was their ultimate technique, I believe," the final Toi clone said, having politely explained it all to her.

...It really did seem as if there were four of her.

“Now,” all four of them said at once. “Prepare yourself.”

The four Tois leaped at Niku all at once—but without any hesitation, Niku elbowed the second one from the right, which was the real Toi.

The three fakes faded into nothing.

“Nghah, nffu! How... did you... see through it?!”

“You focused so much on maintaining the technique it was easier to hit you. That is certainly a good technique,” Niku said.

“...Just for future reference, how did you know which was me?”

“Think. It wouldn’t matter if I missed. They’re just illusions, so they would have disappeared,” Niku began. Thus, a lunging attack would have broken through the wall of illusions, killing two birds with one stone. Repeat until you hit the real one. The fact she hit the right one on the first try was just good luck.

“...You have a point. Good grief, what a terrible ultimate technique,” Toi said, plopping down onto the ground with a vexed smile. “Very well. I lost today, due to focusing too much on my own techniques. It is the loser’s duty to prop up the victor.”

“A wise decision. Now, kneel.”

“Like so?”

Toi obediently knelt. Niku pressed her foot down onto her back, then her head. She proudly stood on her with her socks still on. It was a maid dog atop a maid dog.

“...Mm. Standing on top of a loser is comfortable.”

“...Nmm.”

It may seem surprising how obedient Toi was being, but it was only natural for the loser to comply. That was the way of the world as far as the two of them were concerned. Niku gave Toi’s head two, three stomps for emphasis, then climbed down, having firmly established dominance.

“Now let’s get back, Toi.”

“As you wish, Lady Niku.”

Toi smoothly obeyed Niku. She brushed the dust off her clothes and face, then followed after Niku with a spring in her step.

Thus concluded the battle for dominance, with Toi ending up beneath Niku.



Chapter 1

I watched the dog lolis have their catfight on the monitor, which included Niku's victory.

...But when did Niku learn the chant for my quintuple {Fireball} spell? I really didn't think she could just blast it out like that now.

"Oh, I remember her borrowing one of those sound-recording Golems from Neruneh," Rokuko said.

"Ah. Those things I gave Neruneh as a reward. She's lending them out?"

Niku sure is serious about her training. I had other chants recorded; I wonder if she memorized those, too? She could have learned a lot under my nose here.

"So, Keima," Rokuko said, smiling at me. She seemed oddly pleased. "I lost the bet. Which means it's time for us to go on a date."

"Wait, wasn't I supposed to be the one giving you orders?" *Pretty sure whoever won would get the right to ask something of the other.*

"I think hearing your request would be better in the middle of a date, or maybe the end. Because I mean, you know, I'm a Dungeon Core that can read the mood, so you know, I can guess."

"Hm? What, you guessed I would ask you to shyly take off your socks at the end of the date after they're all steamy?"

"Keima?"

"Kidding, kidding. I just didn't want you acting like my asking for a kiss was absolutely set in stone," I said, taking back my joking request after Rokuko gave me an icy look. *I'm a Dungeon Master who can read the mood.*

"Grrr, when you put it like that it sounds like you don't even want to kiss me!"

"It's more that I'm afraid of what will happen if I do... Especially with Dolce still keeping an eye on us. You-know-who has eyes and ears everywhere. She'll be watching us the whole date. Absolutely, no doubt about it."

“Grrr...”

Dolce was a Ghost-type monster, so worst-case scenario she could phase out and be invisible to me. An invisible auto-tracking camera was about the most terrifying thing possible here.

“We can have a date in the dungeon, then. Not even Dolce can easily go through the walls in the [Cave of Greed], and I’ll know the second there’s an invader. That means we can kiss!”

“But then Elka and the other monsters administrating the dungeon will see us.”

“I can just use my functions to block them!”

“...Also, wouldn’t you want to go to a more fun place? We’re talking about a dungeon here.”

“C-Could you not insult my body like that?! You make it sound like I’m not attractive!”

Oh right, the dungeon is literally Rokuko’s body from her perspective. Guess it does come off as insulting, then.

“Ngggh... I’ll just make a fun place inside the dungeon, then! You forced my hand, but just watch! Before long you’ll be on your knees saying it’s way better than any date spot Leona made!”

“Hold it, Rokuko. You’re losing it. You’re losing the plot here. It only makes sense that a literal dungeon wouldn’t be a good date spot. It’s not supposed to be one. Don’t make me stop you; I don’t want to use my once-only request to stop you from going crazy here.”

“Grrrr...!” Rokuko puffed out her cheeks to show how unhappy she was. But she understood my point and gave up on making the date spot.

Here’s where the real challenge begins. I have to think about what request I actually want to make.

I kind of went along with Rokuko’s bet through inertia, but on second thought there wasn’t really anything I wanted to ask for. Rokuko would usually listen to any request I had to begin with. Even without me using my Absolute Authority.

Though it helped that I usually only made tiny, unimportant requests.

That said, if I asked for a kiss or something here, Haku would hear about it for sure, so asking for that kind of romantic stuff was a bit hard. Who could have foreseen that this right to ask anything would actually be a pain in the neck? Rokuko definitely wouldn't be satisfied if I just asked for something random, too. Eeeh...

"Okay. Rokuko. I have a request."

"W-Wait, here? I mean, go ahead, I guess?" Rokuko began fidgeting. *Sorry, but it's not for a kiss.*

"Lemme use the Dungeon Core as a body heater later. Truth is, I've actually wanted to try that out this whole time."

"S-Seriously, Keima? That's what you're going to ask for...? W-Well, okay, I guess," Rokuko said, blushing a bit as she nodded. *Alright, good, I came up with something that satisfied her. Whew. I win this time.*

"Okay then, let's start planning for the trip," Rokuko said. "We need to pick monsters to possess."

"Before that, we should figure out just how effective the possession is."

"Oh, true."

Thus, we got to work experimenting with the possession. To be clear, we had known for a long time that we could possess the monsters in our dungeon; the question was just concerning the conditions for doing so, and the range. First, I possessed one of our dungeon-produced Gray Rats, which were technically considered monsters. It worked without a hitch, as expected. But when I tried to walk it outside of the dungeon, the possession broke.

"Hm, seems like it doesn't work outside of the dungeon's territory."

I opened the DP Catalog, figuring we had no choice but to just buy the {Possess} skill, but when I started fishing through it, Rokuko stopped me.

"Hold on, Keima. There's no way a dumb skill could beat out dungeon functions. Maybe it just didn't work because it was a nameless monster?"

"Guess I'll make him a Named monster and try again, then."

I named the rat Hektaro, then tried again and successfully possessed him outside of the dungeon territory. It seemed that Rokuko was right; to possess a monster outside of the dungeon, we had to name them.

“Eheeh, I am a dungeon, after all! It only makes sense I would know this!”

“Er, well. Yeah, I suppose.”

We didn’t know how far the range went, though, and if it didn’t reach all the way to the Holy Kingdom, I ran the risk of having to go there myself. Though worst-case scenario, we had Soto’s {Storage} dungeon to use as a shortcut.

And then I realized that it was possible that Leona could possess any of the Beddhist Church Succubi at any moment. They were all named... Sister Suilla, the apprentice Michiru, *etc.* The others naturally were not working as nameless nuns.

“Haku’s keeping an eye on the Succubi, too, so it should be fine, probably,” Rokuko said.

“Yeah... I, er, yeah. For sure. No way would Haku overlook it.”

Not to mention, Haku currently has Leona in prison, so keeping the status quo would probably be for the best.

I elected to investigate this further later and focused instead on getting monsters with human forms for Rokuko and I to possess. Given that the Holy Kingdom was home to human supremacists, it would be best to find a monster that looked human even if their human transformation wore off. The cost of the humanification skill would shrink the closer they were to human (I had seen that it would cost 500,000 DP for Phenny the Phoenix to get humanification, while it would only cost 10,000 for Neruneh since she was basically human already), so with that in mind...

“Let’s dump 300,000 DP on each,” Rokuko said.

“Are you including the humanification cost in that?”

We had the DP payment Haku gave us for the Daide job, and with our savings, using that much didn’t seem too extravagant. Considering they would serve as bodies for Rokuko and I, dumping a lot of DP just seemed logical. Rokuko and I

opened the catalog and began looking for candidates.

“I think a bunny-eared Keima would be nice here,” Rokuko said. “Like a War Rabbit or something. A Cait Sith looks good, too. You would look so cute with cat ears, Keima. Sooo cute.”

“Sure, but we’re going for humans here, alright? We want them to look as humanlike as possible.”

The human supremacists of the Holy Kingdom would consider beastkin as nonhuman, even if dungeon cores like Rokuko thought they were all the same.

“It’ll all be the same with humanification. Maybe a Doppelganger or something would work?”

“Those are 500,000 DP each. Already over budget,” I replied. Going over our arbitrarily assigned budget wouldn’t really matter, but I didn’t want to abandon it right after deciding on it.

“A Shapeshifter, then! Those sound really convenient with their mini versions of your {Ultra Transformation}.”

“...Those are over budget, too. More expensive than a Doppelganger, even.”

Shapeshifters could morph into anything, not just humans, which made them closer to Slimes than Doppelgangers. I had to wonder how much humanification would cost for a high-level Slime.

“Maybe we should just go for Living Armor, then? I could have a girl I possess wearing the armor you’re possessing.”

“Oh, not bad.”

Rokuko and I wouldn’t be acting separately in the first place, so starting off with a combined form would totally work. We could pass off the Living Armor as magic equipment even without giving it humanification, or we could give it humanification and have it pass itself off like Sally, Haku’s Living Armor.

On top of all that, it would fulfill Haku’s request that we not use men. Living Armor doesn’t have a gender, after all. Though maybe armor for men would turn into a man when morphing into human form?

“Okay, then, assuming I go with that... What will you be, Rokuko?”

“Well, if you’re going to be armor, I’ll want to be something completely human... Maybe an Apprentice Witch like Neruneh? Or a Vampire like Rei.”

“You should probably give up on being a Vampire. Covering all their weak spots is pretty expensive... Rei’s the only one we need with zero attack power.”

“Oh, true.”

We flipped through the catalog, keeping an Apprentice Witch in the back of our minds as an option. Incidentally, we excluded Silkies from the candidates since they were fixated on homes and not really suitable for long trips.

“Maybe we should just give up and go with Goblins? We could revive Gobsuke, or summon a Hobgoblin... Maybe a Gobrina?” I suggested.

“No way, Goblins aren’t humans. Also, I really wouldn’t want to possess Gobsuke.”

Seemed that Rokuko with her Goblin fetish didn’t particularly want to be one herself. Perhaps I should have suggested being a Goblin... Though humanification for Goblins sounded expensive and wasteful. The whole appeal of Goblins was that they were cheap and plentiful; dumping a ton of gold on a single Goblin was missing the point. No doubt that was what Rokuko really wanted to say. No doubt at all.

Heh, seems like I was a bit thoughtless here. Moving on.

“Hey, what’s this Nurarihyon thing?”

“The one that looks like an old man with a massively oversized forehead? I think they’re actually good at infiltration.”

“I don’t really want to possess one, though, since it’ll feel like I’m turning into an old man. Mm... Nymphs, Ice Queens... Oh, this Kitsune looks pretty cute, don’t you think?”

“Kitsune are obviously not going to be an option here.”

“We could also have Toi wear armor, then I could hide in your armor...? Okay, no, they’re definitely not relevant. Never mind. I’ll keep looking,” Rokuko said, flipping further through the catalog. Her finger stopped, and I glanced up to see what had drawn her interest only to see her on the page for Succubi and Incubi.

I silently leaned over and hit the next page button.

From there, Rokuko kept hunting and eventually found something that amused her.

“Sooo, the Holy Kingdom is the home of the Church of Light, right? How about an Angel, then?” she suggested.

“An Angel? That’s an option?”

“Seems so. Look,” Rokuko said, showing me the page she had up. They had a base cost of around 100,000 DP, with their base stats and customization options dramatically impacting the cost.

I guess it makes sense, considering they have demons in the catalog, too.

“But wait, didn’t you say before that you didn’t like Angels?”

“Uh-huh. They’re considered servants of the Church of Light’s God of Light. That makes them Father’s enemies, basically, so even I’m surprised to see them in the catalog for dungeon monsters. Was this even here before?” Rokuko asked, tilting her head. Probably not, considering how the catalog added new pages without warning all the time.

Putting that aside, an Angel seemed perfect here. Even if their humanification came undone, they would be treated as a servant of the Church of Light, which would possibly open more doors than it closed. The next page started having some concerningly expensive monsters like Dagon and Shoggoth, which somewhat piqued my curiosity, but, well, it would be rude to talk about monsters on other pages here.

“Want to roll with one?” I asked.

“I’m kinda hesitant, but an Angel would be super useful considering our mission here. I’ll roll with one. I don’t know how expensive the humanification will be, and to make it stronger... Oh, humanification is just an option in the menu, never mind.”

“Oh yeah, it is an Angel. Makes sense that would be an option.”

Also, looks like the humanification option costs more the stronger the monster is by default. And we’ll be wanting a mid-strength monster anyway. Something

too strong would be so inhuman people would see right through it. I mean, it's the oldest trick in the book. I'm not gonna fall for losing a stealth mission by sending in a tank.

"The question is, how much will humanification cost for the Living Armor...? For now, we'll get a weak one and see how much we can strengthen it. At least we know for sure that they can take human form thanks to Sally," I said.

"I'll share some of my DP with you if you don't have enough," Rokuko said.

"Sweet. Okay, let's make a base of full plate armor and... make it iron. That's cheaper than any other material, maybe due to our dungeon."

"Oh, you can go with male armor here."

"Shouldn't it be girl armor for your monster?"

"With male armor, you can put it on yourself if need be. Plus, it being bigger doesn't make it impossible to wear, and there's a skill I'm curious about, too... Really, I *want* you to go with male armor."

"Better too big than too small, eh?"

The male set would probably be heavier and harder to move in, but for a Living Armor that might not matter, and there was certainly a profound appeal to a cute girl wearing a massive suit of armor.

"...Oh, wait. I wonder if we could save on DP by turning an existing suit of armor into one?"

"Probably? No clue," Rokuko replied.

I went and got the anti-Haku suit of armor that I had ended up not actually using. I had already turned it into a Golem, but maybe I could still use it as a base for Living Armor... *Oh, I think I can. Nice, let's do it. Seems like it's only 50,000 DP, too. Pretty good deal. The cost of a full Living Armor is probably 50,000 plus the cost of whatever armor you select.*

"Oh, I know that armor. You were making it before we left."

"Yup. It's pretty strong thanks to the orichalcum plating. Though it's hidden behind a coat of paint."

Sadly, the gleaming and glittering suit of pure orichalcum didn't really suit me. I had made the helmet to be like inset VR goggles, though, so I had to replace that with a normal helmet. Incidentally, the paint job was gray. I chose it thinking that it would be boring and not stick out much. One part had gold plating, though, so nobody would think to mock it. I made the helmet with the same colors. Splash splash, {Dry}, {Create Golem}, and done.

I set aside Rokuko, who was deep in thought beside me trying to figure out how to distribute the rest of her 300,000 DP, and turned the armor set into Living Armor. The armor had been my size to begin with, so possessing it would probably be the most natural thing in the world. The now-living pieces of armor formed together in front of me, then knelt with the sound of clinking metal.

Can I just have the pieces form around me on their own so I don't even have to put it on myself? Convenient.

Anyway, I briskly named the Living Armor Narikin (since you couldn't strengthen nameless monsters), then selected the *Strengthen* option. The price for giving it humanification was... 150,000 DP. That put the total cost up to 200,000 DP, which would allow me to teach it {Storage}, {Create Golem}, and other spells within our budget.

Okay, let's go... Wait, I can modify its human appearance? Ohoho. Guess I'll make it look like me. I could probably prank Wataru by saying, "See, I'm not Japanese," or something. I'll shift some colors around to make him look more like Neruneh's older brother. Introducing: Narikin, Neruneh's older brother. Sounds good to me. If I add on spells to suit the magician alter ego I created, well, this is just too perfect not to do.

And so, after adjusting the appearance, I implemented the strengthening. A magic circle appeared beneath the kneeling Narikin the second I selected it on the menu. The magic circle gained speed as it spun while shining, then lifted up from its feet to head before disappearing. That was probably it.

"Narikin, take human form," I ordered.

"(Clink)... Done. Humanification complete, Master."

Nothing seemed to change, but once Narikin took his helmet off, I saw a second, differently colored me there. Like me with brown hair. He would

definitely pass off as Neruneh's older brother.

"Yooo, you done yet?" I asked, heading over to Rokuko.

"Done already, Keima...? Oooh! He looks just like you! Hold on, Narikin? Isn't that the name you always use? It's like Keima 2: But A Different Color!"

"Figured I might as well. And since he looks alike, I can even use him as a body double."

Even if someone saw me working as Narikin, I could just say they mistook us without noticing. *Oh yeah, now it's coming together.*

"Eheheh, see, it was worth getting male armor!"

Huh? Wait, did she subtly guide me into making a monster that looked just like me...?! Holy cow, Rokuko's scary!

"So, how's your Angel?"

"Mm, well... I selected its stats and adjusted its appearance, but if she'll be Narikin's wife, I need to make her look exactly like me. No arguments. Oh, and I'll change my hair color, too. Now I just need to change her name. Keima, ideas please."

"You're dumping it on me?"

"You gave me my name to begin with, so."

Okay, good point. Let's see... Putting aside that bit about the wife lore, let's try to get something from 695 again. Roccuko... That's kinda terrible, and not very Angel-like. More like a Succubus. Mehhh...

"How about Rokufa Eve? Fa-eve is like 'five,' and Eve can be either a last name or a middle name."

"Oh, it's 695! That's super good. Rokufa it is! I love you, Keima!" Rokuko exclaimed, and her smile made my heart thump.

"Could you not just say that out of nowhere? It makes my heart pound."

"...I love you!"

Don't just blast it out like that either! Nyooo!

* * *

...Thus Rokufa the Angel was born, at the cost of 300,000 DP (including the humanification), along with her partner Narikin the Living Armor Merchant.

Narikin was full plate armor. I had taught him spells like {Storage} and {Create Golem} through scrolls, and when in human form he looked like me with brown hair. All that was left was giving him a copy of Narikin's mask and everything was perfect. He was, indeed, the true Narikin.

Rokufa the Angel. She looked like Rokuko with blue hair, and had faintly glowing rings alongside her angel halo. She was floating slightly above the ground, as if ignoring gravity. Her wings, too, were floating slightly behind her back rather than growing directly out of her back. Seemed like there was no need to open holes in the back of her clothes or armor. Both the wings and the halo disappeared when she went into human form.

"By the way, Rokuko... Did you fiddle with anything?"

"...N-No? Everything is one to one with me."

"You fiddled with the settings, didn't you?"

Rokuko fell silent.

I looked at one particular part of Rokufa's body. Her boobs were noticeably larger. They were basically on Haku's level now.

"...J-Jeez, so what? It's just a little bit, what's the problem?"

"Hey, there's no problem. I was just pointing it out."

I'm a foot guy, not a boob guy, so yeah. Though, uh... I would've thought Rokuko's are a bit too big for her to be worrying about this.

"Er, Master. What should we do now?" Narikin asked timidly. Rokufa wore a similarly concerned expression beside him.

"Oh right. Narikin, Rokufa. You'll be serving as our bodies. Think of it like doing reconnaissance outside of the dungeon."

I explained to them that they had been summoned so Rokuko and I could investigate things outside of the town while still staying in the town. I also

added that they would be acting according to their own judgment when not possessed.

“Yes, sir! Our bodies are yours to command as you will,” Narikin said.

“Understood, Master. May your and Rokuko’s will be done,” Rokufa said.

“Oh, by the way, you two are married in your cover story. Or rather, you’re *actually* married. Got it?” Rokuko said.

“Uh, Rokuko?” I began, but Narikin and Rokufa just gave diligent nods. Well, if they were fine, I was fine. *Is it fine though? Like really? Are you sure...? Okay...*

We went right ahead and tried possessing them. We selected our respective monsters from our menu and possessed them while they were in human form.

“Oh, it worked. Roku... Rokufa, how’s it for you?”

“Perfect, Ke... Narikin,” Rokufa (with Rokuko on the inside) said, looking at me (Narikin) and smiling. She certainly did seem exactly like a palette-swap Rokuko. Though she was the real thing on the inside. Incidentally, our real bodies were resting in futons.

Yep, it sure looks like we’re just sleeping normally.

“Still, this is pretty impressive. It feels like this is actually me,” I said. “I saw everyone controlling the rabbits in the rabbit dungeon, but... Wow, it’s really like this is my own body.”

“It helps that the body is basically the same size as yours. Apparently it feels a lot different if you’re not the same size at all,” Rokuko said, canceling the transformation and spreading out her wings. “Wow, wow! This is amazing. I’ve never felt this feeling before. Also, um, I’m levitating? What the heck? This is so fun.”

“Oh? Let me try,” I said, canceling Narikin’s human transformation. Aaand... Basically nothing exchanged, except my vision. Apparently this was how it felt to see without your eyes. Living Armor didn’t have eyes, after all. And I didn’t have a mouth to chant, either, but I didn’t chant in the first place.

I shot out an experimental fireball, by focusing my mind on the phrase {Fireball}, and out came a ball of fire. It seemed using magic would be simple. As

for {Storage}... It wasn't my {Storage}. There wasn't anything in it, and it didn't connect to Soto's {Storage} dungeon. It was completely, absolutely normal {Storage}.

But I couldn't talk in this form, so I went back into human form... after trying to talk once, just to see what would happen.

"Clink clink clink clink."

"Keima, that's extremely annoying."

Yeah, figures. Guess I'll try using telepathy, then. Like what I use to talk to Kosaki and Siesta. I figure a Living Armor would know the {Telepathy} skill.

"(Testing, testing, one two three. Rokufa, can you hear me?)"

"Hm? Oh, Keima, or rather, Narikin. Using {Telepathy}, I guess?"

"(Seems like we can use telepathy to talk.)"

Rokufa patted my cheeks (as in my metal-armored cheeks) with a hint of wonder.

"So, Narikin. Think we should practice putting you on, just in case?"

"(Sure, sure. Think you can handle wearing me?)"

"Should be fine, if we stuff something inside?"

Worst-case scenario, I can just have my arms perpetually crossed in front of my chest, then do all the moving around myself.

"Hyah."

"(Guh!)"

With loud clinking, Rokufa began tearing my (Narikin's) body into pieces. It didn't hurt, but I could feel myself falling apart.

Whoa, whoa, whoooooa. Feels like I've been pinched and I'm stretching out into infinity. There's this bizarre, otherworldly itchy feeling. Yep, never felt like this in my life.

Rokufa stuck her hands beneath my arms and hefted me up. Now that I looked at it, those gauntlets sure did go up to my shoulders.

“Ah, you’re lighter than I thought. Can you move even with this many of your parts taken off?”

“(Seems like... I can, yeah.)”

“Ooh, neat.”

One of my detached hands wiggled around. Rokufa smacked it around and rubbed it all over, but if she was going to put it on, I would’ve liked her to hurry it up. That tickled.

“Combine...! Hm, this feels kinda nice and chilly.”

“(It’s extremely hot for me.)”

She only had the one arm on, but it was as loose on her as expected. Maybe I should have gone with a female set of armor after all... *Hm? My body’s kinda shaking... Wha?!*

My arm rapidly shrunk like a wool sweater carelessly thrown into the washer. It continued until my gauntlet perfectly fit Rokufa’s arm. The law of conservation of mass had apparently taken the day off work. What the hell?

“Oh, looks like it worked out,” Rokufa said.

“Rokufa, did you do that? The armor just randomly shrunk on its own.”

“That’s probably my Angel skill, {Full-Body Equipment Aptitude}. I thought we would have good compatibility, since you’re a full-body suit of armor, but I didn’t think it would do this much. Wow, so cool. Feels kind of like wearing a firm glove, that’s not too different from normal clothes? Maybe like a mitten,” she said. Apparently she had a special skill that let her wear armor even if it wasn’t quite the right size for her.

...Feels kind of like an RPG that lets a character wear any size of armor as long as it fits their class or whatever. Though I suppose there’s nothing notable about that by this point; this is a world with gods and magic, after all.

Incidentally, the gauntlet returned to its normal size once Rokufa took it off. Wowee, what a surprise.

“Okay, we should be ready now,” Rokufa said matter-of-factly.

“Let’s do some normal preparations, too, alright? Just to be safe. I know we can just buy what we need with DP or have Soto send it over, but still.”

Either way, now that we have monsters for possessing, we can do our reconnaissance mission. I think I’ll use this opportunity to experiment a bit.

“Let’s keep about a thousand gold coins in our {Wallet}. The ones we got from ripping off Wataru,” Rokuko said.

“Don’t put it like that. We earned this money fair and square,” I shot back. It was true that the bulk of our cash money had come directly from Wataru’s wallet, but some of it was from exporting rice to the imperial capital, too. So much so that if not for the Space-Time spell {Wallet}, we’d need to build a whole room to store all of it.

“By the way, has Wataru still not finished paying back his debt?” Rokuko asked.

“...His debt’s going up thanks to interest and Neruneh charging extra.”

I had promised at the time not to charge interest on the debt I tricked Wataru into, but when I saw Neruneh pushing a contract into his hands saying, “But I never said I wouldn’t charge you intereeeeest,” I thought she looked less like an Apprentice Witch and more like a demon. Though perhaps witches were associated with evil acts regardless.

“I’m impressed he bothers to pay,” Rokuko said.

“Let’s just consider it his betrothal gift once he finally manages to seduce Neruneh,” I said.

But wait... Isn’t that usually something brides pay grooms or something? Eh, never mind.

* * *

It would be best to send Haku word of our plans, since this *was* in reality a job we were doing for her. Thus, I went to speak to Dolce, who was currently on duty standing at watch in Goren. She was chilling in the basement beneath the Beddhist Church, and so there I went.

“So, yeah. At Toi’s advice, we’re using possession to infiltrate the Holy

Kingdom,” I concluded.

“I see... The {Possession} skill would require more mana and technique the farther away the target is, but dungeon possession would easily suffice even if you were to pass the Holy Kingdom and travel all the way to Wakoku. I believe that to be a good idea indeed, Keima,” Dolce said, floating and grabbing things out of the air to munch on like snacks. Those were probably the evil spirits that were apparently building up here. And also, just like that, she answered one of the things I had been planning to test.

“The skill {Possession} is harder to use at long range?” I asked.

“You can think of it like trying to hit a farther-away target with an arrow,” she replied breezily. That was an extremely easy to understand analogy. Had Toi been suggesting that method? For shame.

“You sure know a lot about possessions, huh?”

“Well, you can imagine that we use it often ourselves... In particular, I am the head of the imperial spies, and you could call Ghosts the experts of possession. I am also much older than you, so it’s only natural I would be more informed.”

“...Okay, do you know any countermeasures for, say, the monster in question going unconscious while being possessed?”

“Heh, the most beginner question possible. Just use a bird... By which I mean, if you have them possess a bird before you possess them, they will remain conscious inside the bird. Flying makes them perfect aerial scouts as well. It takes some time to learn to fly, but I recommend it. You should teach them {Telepathy}, too, while you’re at it.”

“Holy.”

And just like that, one of the big problems I had been concerned about was solved. All we had to do was send them out before we took over. Truly fearsome was the wisdom of the ancients.

“Should we be using {Possession} for this?”

“It starts getting shaky if you’re outside the dungeon territory; by that I mean it only works well if the possessor is inside the dungeon. You’d be better off just

having them learn {Possess}. Allies won't resist the possession in the first place, so."

In contrast, though, enemies would resist, and so it was standard practice to first destroy their minds with torture and drugs beforehand. *Jesus!*

"Also, you want to minimize how much time you spend watching the monsters through your monitor once they leave. It drains a surprising amount of DP," Dolce added.

"Wait, it uses DP?"

"Yes. It will drain a lot once they're far enough away from the dungeon, so be careful. Exchanging information should generally be done wherever you're possessing them."

It seemed there had once been an incident where she had accidentally drained all the DP given to her and ended up in tears. I had no idea that was even a thing.

"...Thanks for all the help, Dolce."

"No problem. This is a job from Haku, it only makes sense I'd help."

Oh, yeah. Since we're doing a job for Haku right now, we may as well be Dolce's coworkers. Though I'm not about to call myself the fifth of the Four Heavenly Kings.

"Do you think our enemy will be on guard against possessions?" I asked.

"They'll probably be on guard against spies they sent having their minds wiped and then sent back while possessed, but in general there's no point trying to be cautious about possessions, so no. They won't have much in the way of anti-possession defenses."

"O-Oh, okay."

The fact of the matter was, an outsider sent to be a spy would be a spy regardless of whether they were in the process of being possessed or not. The most effective method would simply be looking for spies in the first place.

"Also, I'll send word for Narikin to be awarded the title of baron. Commoners and nobles are treated very differently in the Holy Kingdom. We can call him

your younger brother, with you granting him some of your peerage. Will Narikin Goren do as a name?"

"Oh, yeah. Thanks."

"Rokuko will be accompanying you, no? It should not be surprising that I would offer my assistance."

Narikin's background lore just got "baron" tacked onto "Haku's associate" and "a magician skilled in construction magic." *Baron Narikin... Yeah, alright, that's a pretty awful name. What with Narikin being a shogi thing where a piece gets upgraded to a stronger piece, which over time became a reference to people suspiciously and suddenly coming into wealth; this baron thing just turned his name into an awful pun. I suppose I was asking for it when I chose to name him that.*

"Feel free to ask if you need assistance with anything else, by the way," Dolce added.

"Wait, really?"

"Of course. I can even arrange up to one thousand golds for you, under the name of business costs."

Mm, this is a bit too convenient. She's basically throwing herself at me and trying to do every possible thing she can. I mean, it WAS Haku who gave us this job, so it's not unthinkable that she would help, but up until now she's always avoided work and made it clear all this was just being forced on her. Something's going on here...

"All I can say is, this job is just that hard," Dolce said. "We've been looking into them, too, so be sure to tell us if you learn anything... Don't try to keep all the credit to yourself, okay?"

"Okaaay, I get it now. Right, right, absolutely. I'd want you to take the credit, even."

What, it's as simple as the fact she knows the job's hard? It all makes sense now.

"Oh, by the way," Dolce began, taking out a collar. It was a slave collar, like

the ones Niku and Ichika wore. “You’ll be bringing that dog with you to the Holy Kingdom, right? She’ll stick out less as a slave, so go ahead and put this on her. Actually, Haku gave me this specifically to give to the dog, but I forgot. Don’t tell on me, okay? Teehee.”

That seemed like the kind of thing one should really not just be carelessly forgetting, but either way I accepted the gift. If not for this I would have forgotten about collars entirely and just brought Toi normally... Gotta get it on her, fast.

* * *

We finished preparing for Narikin, Rokufa, and Toi’s trip, and it became time for them to leave Goren with a birdcage containing two birds (Tran and Ceiver). They were black birds with white wings, much like long-tailed tits, and while they were completely obedient due to having been born from the dungeon, the cage was there for disguise purposes.

Incidentally, Toi wore the collar I had given her. Though it wouldn’t actually control her. She had said, “Oh, I will put it on, but do not expect it to work,” then followed it up by saying, “I shall demonstrate if you order me not to lie— Good. Then, if you’ll excuse me. You are quite an adorable girl, Keima,” in order to show that the collar wouldn’t react. It seemed that slave collars worked by sensing one’s intent, and with Demon King style’s Detachment.

Which reminds me, didn’t Niku learn to use Detachment, too? She could start a rebellion against me any time she wanted... Oh no! Anyway.

In order to create my own alibi and prove Narikin was a different person after all, I saw the party off all the way to the Tsia Mountain Tunnel.

“Alright, Narikin. This job’s fate rests in your hands,” I said solemnly, handing him a Golem clock. That was less so he could tell the time in general, and more so he could give regular reports.

...Also, even though we literally have the same bodily proportions, he looks buffer than me since he’s wearing robes over his armor. I look like his little brother when we stand next to each other.

“Understood. We shall be off,” Narikin replied.

“Master, Rokuko. We shall be awaiting eight tonight,” Rokufa said.

“Farewell, Lord Keima,” Toi said. “Until we meet again. You may look forward to reports of my success.”

And so, the Narikin party left for a search-and-destroy mission in the Holy Kingdom.

...However! I had absolutely nothing to do until they all reached the Holy Kingdom! I mean, that only made sense, given the whole point of us summoning them had been so they could do this for us, but basically, this meant I had spare time... I... had... spare time...?

Ahem, ahem! Time to get to sleep immediately! Now that Toi's outside the town, I have a lot less to worry about, so yeah! It's snoozing time!

But as I stood there shaking with excitement, someone approached me—it was Wozma, Goren's vice-chief. But why?

“Who was that with you, town chief? He quite resembled you.”

“Hm? Oh. That's Narikin, a relative of mine. I asked him to do a little job for me.”

“Ah, your family... That would explain the resemblance. Was he your younger brother, perhaps?”

“Wow, nice eyes.”

We chatted on our way back to the chief residence. Though... I didn't really know why Wozma was following me. We went inside, and at that point I remembered he actually had work today. I wished him good luck, and headed for my room, only for him to grab me by the shoulder firmly.

“Town chief? That is not the way to your office.”

“...I was planning to start a good nap.”

“Ahaha, but so much work piled up while you were away for so long,” Wozma said with a smile that did not reach his eyes.

“Whoa, hold on, whaddaya *mean* a bunch of work piled up? I told you to handle everything, didn't I?”

“I of course did everything I feasibly could, but there is much going on here that requires you in particular. There are the negotiations with Dragg, the Tsia archduke matters, and so on that have been waiting for your return.”

“Are you being serious...?”

“But of course. You have a mountain of work, and I am told the Beddhist church wishes to speak to you as well.”

Oh no... Having no other choice, I headed to my office with Wozma.

* * *

I somehow managed to finish my work (for the day) and returned to my room, where I found Rokuko waiting for me.

“You sure took forever, Keima.”

“Oh, hey. What’re you doing here? Did we have something planned?”

“No, but I was waiting since there was something I wanted to do,” Rokuko said, sniffing proudly.

But I want to sleep... I just worked so hard...

“I heard this from Rei, but apparently info about the dungeon is spreading a lot faster now. They’ve started having to stock more Golem Blades, too. She came to me asking if we could change things up a bit.”

“Oh yeah, I remember a document saying that,” I said. It was a request for expanding the town, stating that the dungeon was producing more Magic Blades, and that we could predict an influx of adventurers and those looking to live here that would be difficult to manage otherwise. I had just stamped my approval onto it since I didn’t see any problem with expanding my living place—hopefully that hadn’t been a mistake.

“I don’t really feel like it. Can’t we just keep things the way they are a bit?”

“Um, Keima? Did you just say you don’t really *feel* like it, like you don’t care? This is *my body* we’re talking about... Are you saying you don’t mind other people conquering it?”

“Oh, er, right, I take it back. Let’s tweak some things and slow the flow...”

“That’s my Keima!” Rokuko exclaimed with a beaming smile. It seemed that Rokuko was concerned not about the flow of magic blades, but how conquered her dungeon was considered. And I certainly didn’t feel good myself hearing that Rokuko’s body was being conquered.

“So, I think we should build a date spot!” she continued.

I blinked.

“I think we should build a date spot.”

“I heard you the first time. Where is that coming from...? No, don’t answer. I can guess. While spending time in Daide you thought about how if we had date spots like that we could go on dates whenever we want, and also that you’ll make me bend the knee to how appealing your body is, or something, right?”

“Wow, Keima. You’re spot on.”

“You did pretty much say that outright before, so yeah.”

I had thought she’d given up on it, but apparently not.

“Also, with places like that more people will get married and move in here, which means more DP for us. And then more still when their babies are born. See? This is important for dungeons; it’s nothing but positives,” Rokuko said.

“That’s pretty wonky logic, but alright. I’ll play along.”

I lay down onto the bed, deciding to listen while resting after all that work.

“Also, like... I just want to make a place that’s pretty!”

“A place that’s pretty, huh? Like the hill with a good view of the night sky.”

“Right, right. Like the hill we kissed on,” Rokuko said, which reminded me of the kiss and made my cheeks hot. A closer look revealed her cheeks were red, too.

“...Keima, your cheeks are red, did you notice?”

“Pot, meet kettle.”

We were both in the same predicament, so we cordially elected not to discuss it further.

“Anyway, a night sky won’t be easy to make in a dungeon. It’s all indoors, after all.”

“It was just an example; it could be something else. The important thing is it having the right mood.”

“Right...” So she said, but it didn’t quite click in my mind. “I guess what matters is what kind of place you would want to kiss in?”

“I would say it’s more about what kind of place will actually get you to do it. I’m always ready, you know.”

“...Are you saying that hoping I’ll do something?”

“Just kiss me already. Mm.” Rokuko spread out both arms wide to welcome me into her loving embrace.

Do you actually think I could do that?! After this incredibly bizarre lead-up?!

“...See, I can tell what you’re thinking right now. I want something to give you that final push. It’s settled, we need a place inside the dungeon Dolce can’t see. Hm... Maybe I should go with a room with walls that close in to actually push us together?”

“A final push is supposed to be metaphorical. Do you want to make a Keima sandwich?”

That said, I understood what Rokuko was getting at. In short, she wanted a moody place that we could be alone in together that would motivate me to kiss her. *Eeeh... Maybe a planetarium? Nah, we wouldn’t need to go to the dungeon for that; Goren’s a country town and the stars are beautiful at night.*

“Also, don’t you think the mood would be improved with some deadly traps around? I think that would be called the suspension bridge effect.”

“I’d be more focused on survival than kissing... Though, well, using some traps to stave off adventurers and keep the place pretty might be an option.”

“Right, right, that’s what I’m talking about!” Rokuko exclaimed, smacking my back while grinning. *Alright, alright, I’ll think about it.*

To be safe, though, I would fulfill the actually important objective, too. (That being to lessen the flow of Magic Blades.)

* * *

“Keimaaa. It’s almost eiiight,” came the call.

“Whoa, so it is. Can’t believe it’s so late already.”

It ended up time for the daily report while I was fiddling around with things. That wasn’t a problem, though. I would take my time with this construction. It wasn’t anything urgent to begin with.

Today we were both getting the report, and double-checking the process for possessing Narikin and Rokufa. Rokuko and I moved to the safety of the Master Room, then contacted Narikin’s group.

The two monsters weren’t on our map. Normally that would mean they were out of our purview, but since they had names, we could contact and possess them through the Named list.

First I displayed Narikin’s vision on the monitor. Seemed like they were in an inn room. Rokufa and Toi were there, too. It took a second to realize, but he was actually looking at the pocket watch I had given him, and was probably waiting for me to contact him at any second. I promptly did just that.

“Testing, testing, we’ll be performing the possession thirty seconds from now. Nod if you understand, and prepare as discussed,” I said. Narikin’s vision bobbed as he nodded. He then briskly got into bed and shut his eyes.

Thirty seconds later, Rokuko and I performed the possessions, while similarly resting in futons within the Master Room.

The next time I opened my eyes, I was in an unfamiliar room lit by a fishy-smelling lamp. Narikin was on a hard bed, so I could guess we were in a Pavella inn. Beside me was Rokufa, sitting in a chair beside the bed. She was blinking rapidly.

“Whoa. Seems like it worked,” I said.

“Hooray, Ke... ahem, Narikin,” Rokuko said, having successfully possessed Rokufa as well. She was basically just Rokuko with blue hair on the outside, so when she was Rokuko on the inside, too, it was fair to say she was just outright Rokuko. With two big exceptions.

“Welcome, my lord and lady. I am glad to see the possession was a success,” Toi said, wearing a maid uniform and a suspicious-as-hell smile as she stood near the door.

“Toi. What’s with the clothes?” I asked. Toi’s maid outfit was one more commonly seen in this world, a simple arrangement of clothes with few frills or decoration. When she left she had been wearing simple travel gear, however.

“I purchased these here in Pavella. It was more convenient for me to serve as a bodyguard and servant. I can change if this displeases you, however.”

“Nah, it’s fine... unless it sticks out. Also, why’re you calling us ‘lord’ and ‘lady’ like that?”

“I have elected to drop your names so that I do not mistake them. And is the story not that they are married? In which case, it is only logical that as a maid I would call you such.”

“I see, that’s true,” I replied. That would mean less incidents like her calling me Lord Narikin and me not responding, which would be suspicious.

“Lord and lady... Ahaha, I’m his wife. Yes, go with that, Toi. You’ll go with it, too, right, Keima? Oops. I shouldn’t call you by your name, right. Mm... As your wife, it wouldn’t be wrong for me to call you ‘dear’ or ‘darling,’ right?” Rokufa (Rokuko) asked with a tilt of her head.

“Er, I guess...?”

“I knew you’d understand, darling. In which case, well, ahem, I’ll be calling you darling while on this mission. What will you call me?” Rokufa (Rokuko) asked with a grin. It was a grin that made it clear that it was Rokuko on the inside, blue hair or not.

“Here we go.”

You want me to call you my wife, huh? Huh Alright then, you asked for i—

My thoughts were interrupted by Toi tapping my shoulder. “Incidentally, my lord... Lord Narikin addressed Lady Rokufa as ‘my beloved wife’ when speaking to the locals.”

“That’s gotta be a lie! Some kind of joke!”

“(No, I did. Is there a problem with it?)” came a voice in my head. It was the telepathy. I looked at the table and saw the bird in the birdcage... Tran (Narikin) looked this way.

“Aah, Narikin. Right, I see your possession worked too.”

“(Indeed. I am here with my beloved wife,)” he said, which inspired Ceiver (Rokufa) to extend a wing around Tran (Narikin) and hug him close to her. *What, were you two lovebirds all along?*

“Er, let me guess... Rokuko told you to talk like that?”

“Yes. Rokuko kindly educated us.”

I looked at Rokufa (Rokuko). She was giving me a smug grin.

“Eheheh... Now, daaarling? You know what to call me... right?”

“This was all part of your evil plot?!” *What are you teaching these young, pure dungeon monsters?!*

We were interrupted by a heavy sigh. It sounded like a deflating balloon.

“My lord, my lady. You may flirt as you wish, but please do not do so all day.”

“Er, right. Anyway... We’ll be doing possessions like this from now on, too. Keep up the good work.”

“Understood.” Toi and the birds nodded.

“Now, daaarliiiiing. Out with it. My beloved wife!”

“Can we at least cut out the ‘beloved’ part? It’s honestly just, you know, kind of embarrassing...”

“Fine, but you owe me a favor.”

Why do I owe Rokuko a favor for this... Why...

After that, we performed some more detailed checks and then ended the possessions.

“Going on a trip in someone else’s body is surprisingly fun,” Rokuko said, stretching atop her futon in the Master Room. The Fairies we had summoned to manage the dungeon, Elka’s split copies, brought us cups of water, which I

chugged in one go. Phew.

“You know, we should make some space in the Master Room just for the futons... Maybe set up some folding screens. It’s a bit too spacious in here for me to really relax,” I said.

“Oh, I guess we can, since we’ll only be sleeping here for the possessions anyway? Or how about we make a room that only you and I can enter? Wait... Oh!” Rokuko’s eyes suddenly widened. It seemed her own words had made her realize something important. “Keima! That’s it, this is exactly where Haku can’t see us no matter what! I mean, it’s inside me, so even Dolce and the others can’t spy on us like you were worried about!”

“Er, uh, well, I... guess that’s true?”

“On top of that, if we tell them we’re here so we can do the possession in perfect safety, we can even have an alibi for hiding away in here! In fact, right at this very moment, we’re alone together in a place where Haku absolutely can’t see us! What do you think about that, Keima?!” Rokuko exclaimed, shooting up close to me such that her face was right in front of mine.

“...It’s true?”

“It is! And what, if you’re worried about Elka or whoever seeing, we can go a step past folding screens and just make a whole little room. We don’t have to go to the Demon Realm or Daide to be alone, like, not at all!”

And that was that. Rokuko gave a proud grin.

“Well, about that, Rokuko.”

“What?”

“Dolce and the others won’t have to come inside to know what’s going on. If you grin like that they’ll figure it out in a second,” I said, which made Rokuko shut her mouth.

Dolce and the others weren’t incompetent. Rather, they were absurdly overcompetent. If we tried to hide and be all lovey-dovey in secret, they would be able to tell just from our mood.

“I-I’ll try to contain myself.”

“I don’t think I could myself, so I’m just not gonna try. It’d be so obvious they’d interrogate me an entire day until I cracked. So at the very least, we need to wait until we don’t need to guard against Haku, and we can kick out her spies.”

“Wait, y-you’re the one who wouldn’t be able to hide it? I guess it can’t be helped, then... Ehehe.” Rokuko gave a big grin.

From there, we returned to the inn, and Dolce immediately appeared and gave us a deathly flat stare, asking whether anything had happened between us. (Her eyes were glowing red, so she was probably asking with the lie-detecting skill.) It seemed she had been curious about why Rokuko looked so happy.

...Yeaah. I rest my case, Rokuko.

* * *

Anyway, while Narikin’s group was on its way to the Holy Kingdom, I decided to modify the dungeon. If I wanted to stymie the flow of Magic Blades, I could just put normal swords in the rooms instead of Magic Blades, but Rokuko was less concerned about that and more concerned about how far the conquering had progressed. It seemed that dungeons had this instinctual urge to forestall progress that invaders were making toward conquering them, even if they had a safe zone buried deep within them that was completely untouched.

She sure has gotten cocky since I first met her as a baby dungeon with one hallway and one room, huh? Not that I mind. Feels kind of like she’s finally grown up and learned some shame.

Thus, I had no time limit for the reconstruction or any sort of deadline. I could go as slow as I wanted, without ticking Rokuko off. I wanted to go slow here, since I didn’t want to make so many sudden changes that people started calling it a Paradigm Shift.

I chilled in bed in the Master Room, trying to think up some ideas for a good date spot, when suddenly my {Storage} opened on its own and Soto stuck her head out.

“Papaaaa! Toi and the others already left?!”

Soto's {Storage} dungeon remained connected even inside the Master Room. That made sense considering I myself was the dungeon's source, but still, I would like for my daughter to respect my privacy.

"Why did you let them go?!"

"I mean, because they were ready."

"So mean! Niku and Toi hadn't given me their twin set socks yet!"

"I know that you've been withdrawing their matching maid socks into your dungeon."

"Those are from the maid set, not what I'm talking about here! Jeez! How do you not even know that, papa?!" Soto yelled, angry for some baffling reason.

"Listen up, papa. The twin set is not their uniform, it's their casual clothing! In short, you could call it what they wear when their guard is down, and they're being more their real selves. On top of that, they're wearing matching socks as twins! The pinnacle of a tight bond! Their socks will be not only twice as good as usual, but twice more so, so four times as good!"

It seemed Soto was more obsessed with clothing than I was. Maybe that was Rokuko's influence.

"At this point, my only option is to barge into their {Storage} and retrieve their musky, travel-worn socks myself! I want to eat socks full of holes!"

"No way, it's a secret that you can connect to other {Storages}, alright?"

"Grrr!"

I stroked Soto's head to calm her down. Her silky black hair sure felt nice.

"By the way. Rokuko wants me to make a wondrous date spot in the dungeon. Got any ideas?" I asked, hoping to distract her from her still-burning wrath.

"A wondrous date spot? Like... a sock store, maybe? I think it'd be wondrous to have a place where I can eat as many used socks as I want."

"That would be pretty amazing, but try to keep in mind that kind of thing is extremely abnormal," I replied. Normal people decidedly did not eat socks.

“What about something more normal, like a museum of art with only sock exhibits?”

“Not normal either. I would be interested, though.”

Okay, seems like I have to teach my daughter exactly what “normal” means.

“Obviously, any spot will do as long as you and mama can be together.”

“I feel like Rokuko would say the same, but...” I trailed off. It was a bit hard to tell my daughter that Rokuko had asked for a romantic spot to give me a push since I was too much of a virgin to do it on my own.

“In that case, you should just ask everyone else! I’ll go do that!”

“Er, uh, what?”

Before I could say anything, Soto was back in {Storage}. My daughter had extremely high mobility.

I had no idea things would end up like this...

* * *

“Attention, attention please. We shall now begin... the dungeon competition!” Rei declared in the Master Room at night, once everyone had finished their work in the inn. Beside her was a whiteboard, with the words “Dungeon Competition” written on it in marker.

Gathered were Kinue, Neruneh, Ichika, Niku, Soto, Elka, and even the Silkies. You could say everyone but Rokuko was here.

“Why is this happening?” I wondered aloud.

“You wished to gather input regarding modifying the dungeon for Rokuko, Master, so we elected to give our all into helping you,” Rei said. Rokuko wasn’t here out of concern for spoilers; it wouldn’t be fun if she knew what we were making beforehand. Instead, I would be taking her there once it was ready.

“We’ve all brought ideas we’re extremely confident in!” Rei declared. “Surely some among them will please you, Master. Now. Ahem... We’re pressed for time, so let’s begin with Instructor Ichika and Kinue.”

Ichika and Kinue were the top batters, it seemed. They stepped forward to

stand by the whiteboard.

“Okay dudes, I’m up first. Testing, testing, one two three. ’Kay, my thought is, there’s one thing this dungeon’s hella missing. And that thing is FOOD!”

Ichika wrote “FOOD” on the whiteboard, the marker making a thumping sound with each stroke due to the sheer force with which she wrote.

“What’re you talking about, Ichika? Kinue’s got plenty of food,” I said.

Ichika shook her head with exasperation. “The inn does, sure. Kinue’s grub sure is fine, for real. But I’m thinkin’ we need a place where we can really go to town!”

I was pretty sure she was the only one who needed or wanted such a place.

“Of course, I get that a buffet’s not exactly fitting with our dungeon’s gimmick. That’s why I’m sayin’ we should buy a mountain of grub, then make it so a door only unlocks if you eat all of it! How’s that, huh?!”

“I would be in charge of the cooking, of course,” Kinue said with a hand on her chest. *I see... Ichika’s lust for food and Kinue’s lust for chores are unifying their goals into one.*

“What about the ingredients? Sounds like we’ll just be paying for the adventurers’ food,” I said.

“Tch, tch, tch, I already thought of that, duh. Two words: Rabbit Spawner. Remember the ones in Mikan’s place? We can just spawn hella rabbits through it and eat them. Then we can spawn plants, veggies, the works. Am I right or am I right, Kinue?”

“Indeed. There are also herb spawners. We will not lack for flavors.”

As Ichika and Kinue said, with the dungeon’s spawn function we could get as many ingredients as we wanted with only a single initial cost. We could also do this for the inn’s kitchen as well.

“But still, that would be too much of a burden on Kinue. You want her to make food for the dungeon while working? I’m not gonna allow that.”

“Gr... But I can make food in an instant with the {Chef} skill. It won’t be a problem.”

“No. Not to mention, we’ll go bankrupt if anything happens to Kinue.”

The {Chef} skill only let her make food in an instant from our perspective. Time still moved normally for her, so essentially she would be stuck working constantly in a hellish time prison.

“Fine, fine. You can just teach a Golem some of Kinue’s recipes then, dude.”

“What?!” Kinue exclaimed. “I-Ichika, you’re betraying me?!”

“What else can I do? Master said no, girl.”

That made sense. No point not having Golems do the dungeon gimmicks, cooking or not. I could just have them learn automatic recipes like I had taught them to play music in Mikan’s dungeon.

“You’ve got your inn work, Kinue. It’ll take time to teach Golems, but... It’s a possibility.”

“Ngh... If you insist. Your wish is my command, Master,” Kinue said, accepting my decision despite her vexation.

“It’s a good idea that fits the [Cave of Greed]. I’ll keep it in mind. Also... If we start slow cooking more food, and trap them in so they can’t leave until they finish eating everything, it might actually buy a lot of time.”

“I see. Thorough slow cooking could last over half a day,” Kinue nodded.

“Brutal, Master. It’s legit painful to have to sit still for half a whole day,” Ichika shuddered.

Ichika sure is merciless when it comes to food; not many people would suggest devouring rabbits by the thousand after seeing the cute ones in Mikan’s dungeon. Oh yeah, maybe I could make a trap where someone has to kill a Minotaur and make food out of its meat before they can advance.

“Call me for the test!”

“I will handle matters if the Golem cannot,” Kinue said firmly, then sat back down with Ichika. *Not a bad first suggestion, really. Though it was hardly a date spot.*

“It’s nice that we could reuse the blood from the food as my snack; very

efficient. In any case, moving on. Soto and Niku, please step forward.”

And so they did.

“Okaaay! Our idea is... a room that shows off treasure!” Soto exclaimed. She erased the text on the whiteboard, and Niku wrote “Treasure” on it. “In short, there’s a room with treasure everyone wants in the labyrinth that absolutely cannot be entered by any means! Put windows on it, so people can see inside!”

“Ooo. And?”

“That’s it! They’ll just be super curious about the wondrous treasure!”

“Distractions can be fatal for adventurers. The idea is to make that happen, Master,” Niku explained. It was true that idle minds could kill adventurers.

“Not a bad idea, but there’re two problems. First of all, what exactly is something that everything wants?” I asked.

“Why, socks, of course! We can decorate the room with the socks everyone is wearing right now.”

“Soto. I said something that *everyone* would want. Not a small group of fetishists.”

“Master,” Rei said, raising a hand. “I do have one idea. The dwarves reacted very strongly when they saw the orichalcum alloy holy symbol, didn’t they?”

Oh yeah, that was a thing. Back when I first made the Beddhist church, I think. Gozou and Kantara actually tried to quit their original religions just to join Beddhism over it.

“Nice memory, Rei.”

“Ohoho, yes, please do shower me with praise.”

Still, I get the feeling the orichalcum alloy was an enormous deal. I feel like we might end up swarmed with dwarves and smiths... Things might get out of hand, fast.

“Is there anything a bit less extreme...?” I asked.

“If you’re looking for something simple, dude, how about a huge frickin’ pile of gold?” Ichika suggested.

“Oh, not bad. Money is equally loved by all, so yeah.”

And if they were just for show, I could even use copper coins with gold paint or something of the sort. That way, it wouldn't hurt our pockets even if someone managed to bust through the walls or something to get them. Putting aside the orichalcum alloy for a second, we could also put a bunch of colored glass gemstones around.

“Okay, first problem settled. The second problem is the possibility of them breaking the walls, windows, or something to get inside. Not to mention that they could possibly use {Teleportation} to get inside since they can see it.”

“Could we not just use the monitor to show them?” Niku asked. That wasn't terrible, but...

“It wouldn't feel three-dimensional. Pictures could work, but well... Oh, wait, hold on. We could bore two peepholes and make it into, like, a VR-goggle kind of thing?”

That seemed actually feasible. Though it'd take a bit of finesse and testing.

“Okaaaay, what abooooout, making the entire room a pitfall traaaap?” Neruneh said, flipping common sense on its head. “So if they use {Teleportation} to get iiiin, they'll fall for the traaap.”

“Oh, not bad. It'll end up baiting and taking out people who know {Teleportation}.”

Individuals capable of using {Teleportation} were extremely rare, to the point I only really knew of Haku and her subordinates (excluding Misha) who could do it without a massive team, but that was exactly why a trap targeting them would be so powerful. If we could take out even a single high-level teleporter with it, well, it would be a cheap investment.

“Wonder if we could use strengthened glass on the walls...? Acrylic might work here. I think I saw the materials for that in the catalog.”

Oh, but instead of a pitfall, I might as well just fill it with carbon monoxide and make it a closed room. A vacuum would work, too, but getting rid of all the air sounds like a pain in the neck.

“Yep, yep, that’s a pretty good idea. I’ll keep it in mind,” I said, stroking Niku and Soto’s hair.

“I still think socks would be better than gold coins.”

“Soto. We can just add socks to the pile, can’t we?”

“You’re a genius, Niku!”

“Let me just make it clear that the whole room is going to be a trap, so even if you try to drop by, you won’t be able to get inside,” I said. Soto hung her head sadly, but I was unmoved. She could make her own dungeon a sock paradise without infecting mine.

All that said, the trap felt like it would be very in-character for the [Cave of Greed]. Treasure you could look at safely, but which attempting to get close to would kill you instantly. A truly excellent idea. The only problem was that, once again, a mountain of gold coins could hardly be considered a romantic date spot.

“Okay, moving on. Neruneh. Your idea?” Rei prompted.

“Okaaaay.”

Seemed like it was finally Neruneh’s turn.

“My ideaaa, goes basically liiiike, thiiiiis,” Neruneh said, writing “Eroticism” on the whiteboard. Uhhhh. “What I have hereee, is bodily liquid harvested from the Succubi nuuuns. We’ll make scented perfumes out of iit, and fill the room with theeem.”

“Wait, wait, wait, wait. I’ve got a bad feeling about this,” I said, cutting her off. What was with the jar? What Succubi liquids?

“Ooooh? What’s wrooong?”

“First of all, what’s with basing your idea on eroticism?”

“Ooooh? I checked with Rokuko what these modifications were abooout, and learned this was all to make a date spot that would push a virgin like you to make the first moooove, but was that wrooooong?”

No, but what?!

“Ah, an expert move by Neruneh. To think she would speak to Rokuko directly,” Rei said.

“Oh, so that’s what’s up?” Ichika said.

“That’s just like you, papa!” Soto said.

Ngh, now everyone knows. This sucks!

“So in shooort, I acquired bodily fluids from the Succubi nuuuns, aaaand, just so you knooow, Succubi bodily fluids are aphrodisiaaacs.”

“I don’t really want to be pushed in the sense of being put into heat, okay?!”

“Lady Rokuko approved of iiit, thooough.”

Why would she ever do that?! This is so obviously not good!

“Weeell, even without making perfuuumes, if we dye a pervy statue with iiit, the effects should still take hoooolld. This is saliva, so it’s fairly stroooong.”

“Rejected! Not doing this!”

I shook my hand, shutting the idea down. Haku would slit my throat if we had something that perverted in the dungeon.

“Y’know, gotta say my dude, I think this might be the perfect thing for a turbo virgin like you,” Ichika said.

Shut up, Ichika!

“Anywaaay, since the Succubi owe us they said they would be willing to provide saliva whenever we need iiiit, you can go ahead and have thiiis,” Neruneh said, handing me the jar. By which I mean she grabbed my wrist, wrenched it around so my palm was up, then forcibly pushed the jar on top of it. *Can I just throw this away?*

“Okay team, let’s forget that just happened,” Rei said. “Silkies, go.”

“Roger!” all three of them exclaimed at once, standing in unison. Hanna, the one with the white hairpin, wrote “mini-labyrinth” on the whiteboard.

“Our idea is to make a labyrinth. Not a big one like what we have already, but a smaller one,” Nicole (red hairpin) said, and Pio (yellow hairpin) continued for her.

“Like, you dig lines into a wall, and you have to solve that maze to move forward.”

As always, the three Silkies sure were a close trio.

“I see, so it’s like a puzzle.”

“Yes, and digging the lines into the walls is what’s key.”

“The lines will collect a lot of dust.”

“We want to clean. We want to clean the dust.”

C’mon. Don’t just bare your lust like that, you three. At least try to hide it a little.

“But it’s a puzzle in a dungeon. You wouldn’t need to clean it to begin with.”

“Say... What? Nicole, what do we do?”

“Calm down, Hanna. We planned for this. Right, Pio?”

“Right. We’ll ask for the rights to clean just this one room, and live out our dream of cleaning the dungeon... Our ambition stays strong.”

I can hear all of this, you know.

It was then that Kinue interjected with a composed smile. “The right to clean the dungeon is mine. I will not hand it over.”

“Please, commander, let us just have one to clean!”

“It’s no fair for you to get the whole dungeon! Boo, boo!”

“Ngh, we talked about this, commander. Please give your subordinates some work, too...”

Do you all seriously want to clean that much? Fearsome are the instincts of a Silky.

“I mean, surely one room would be fine?” I suggested.

“Ngh, if you insist, Master...” Kinue trailed off, seeming unsatisfied. *Look, I’ll add extra rooms to compensate. I hope that’s enough.*

“Still, solving a maze to unlock a door could work. Only problem is that the difficulty would be a bit low. Might want to modify it a bit.”

“Anything with dug-out ridges will work,” Hanna said.

“We won’t complain as long as we get to clean.”

“Same.”

I’m getting the impression that you three exclusively care about the cleaning part of this.

“Eh, well. I’ll add a gimmick that takes dexterity. Like, maybe... You have to drag a stick from the start to the finish line, but if you hit a wall on the way you’re out, or something.”

I recalled seeing a variety show back on Earth that did something like that, except with electrically charged walls. The contestants had to get through it to unlock treasure. That seemed possible to recreate with some high-level use of {Create Golem}. Of course, I couldn’t have it spark that much, but maybe I could have monsters attack when they failed, or something like that.

“Wow, that seems fun!” Hanna exclaimed.

“Sticks on top of the ridges! Please, give us more to clean!”

“Also, please light the room with a chandelier.”

Why a chandelier... Because it has so much surface area to clean? Okay, I understand completely.

“Well, this all sounds fun and kind of like a game, so I’ll keep it in mind.”

“Thank you, Master!”

“When it is complete, please grant us the right to clean it all ourselves!”

“End the maid commander’s tyranny!”

And so, the Silkies finished their presentation.

“Ahem. Now then. To finish things off, Elka and I will announce our ideas,” Rei said. It seemed that her subordinate Elka would be filling in as her assistant here. She flew up with her fairy wings pattering and wrote “Gate” on the whiteboard.

“My idea is to create a gate. That is all.”

I see Rei making the smuggest grin I've ever seen in my life, but, uh, what? A gate? That's all?

"Rei, Rei, I don't think they understood. You need to explain more," Elka said, whispering into Rei's ear.

"O-Oh? You think so?"

Indeed. We didn't understand at all. Gotta explain what you mean.

"Erm, in that case, let me try again. I suggest we make a gate. Except, this gate cannot be opened."

"A gate that... can't be opened?"

"Indeed! It will be fairly ornate, the image of the divine, and one that speaks of hidden treasure and adventure waiting just beyond its doors. However...! It can never, ever be opened through any means!"

Elka glanced at Rei, cheering her on. We were understanding! She was conveying her ideas.

But in short, Rei's idea was just, make a dummy gate.

"I see, so they'll put their all into opening the gate, but it never will. Thereby buying time."

"Precisely! No doubt the foolish adventurers will waste their time exploring in an attempt to open the wondrous gate. But too bad for them! It will never, ever open!"

I see. That sounds pretty fun.

"The main problem is that nothing will happen if they just ignore it, and it ends up useless if they learn it can't open."

"Ngh!"

It was a noob trap that... well, didn't necessarily trap anyone, and only worked a single time before someone investigated it and figured out the trick.

"But I'll use it anyway!"

"What?! Really?! Yay!" Rei jumped with literal joy.

“Masteeer, why’re you using Rei’s wack idea?” Ichika asked.

“Because it’s the closest to a date spot out of any of the suggestions. And it’ll be easy to make regardless.”

“Aaah,” Ichika replied, nodding with understanding. Everyone else seemed to be in agreement as well.

“That said, the other ideas were good, too, so I’ll make them in order. Excluding Neruneh’s.”

“Awww? Whaaat?”

As everyone rejoiced, Neruneh alone tilted her head in disbelief. It really wasn’t that hard to understand.

* * *

For today’s report, I possessed the bird rather than Narikin directly. I looked around and found that Narikin was in a room made of wood... or in other words, a room in a ship. It seemed they were heading to the Holy Kingdom by boat. I communicated with Narikin using {Telepathy}.

“(Testing, testing. How’re things? Must be going well if you’re on a boat.)”

“Master. Possessing the bird today?” Narikin replied.

“(Yep. Probably won’t be anything important to report today anyway, and this is easier for you, yeah?)”

Narikin opened up the birdcage and let me out. He looked like me, but he was pretty considerate.

I flew up and landed on Narikin’s shoulder. “(Thinking about it, maybe we could’ve used Magic Blades for this instead of birds.)”

“Lord Keima. In contrast, it is harder to possess inanimate objects. Though I do not know the extent of the dungeon function’s powers, and the Living Armor would likely not struggle to do so,” Toi replied. That made sense.

“Indeed. I could likely do it, but I do not know about Rokufa,” Narikin said.

“(Yep... Wait, did you just call Rokufa by her name?)”

“Yes, because there is no problem in doing so.”

He has a point. Eh... Did he only call her "my beloved wife" at first on Rokuko's orders?

"I do call her 'my beloved wife' when in public, of course. Isn't that right, my beloved wife?"

"Indeed, darling..." Rokufa began, then blinked. "Nngh? Oh, what's going on here?"

"Hrm? What's wrong, Rokufa? Aaah... My lady is here."

Rokufa's aura changed in an instant. *Oh, so that's what the moment of possession looks like*, I thought to myself while looking at Rokufa-cum-Rokuko.

"(C'mon, Rokuko. Say something before you possess them.)"

"Wait, that's you, Keima...? So cute!"

"(Guh?! Quit it!)"

Rokufa (Rokuko) grabbed me at once, and I flapped my wings in protest. I somehow managed to get my right wing out, which I smacked her hand with.

"You're chirping a lot, but you know I can't understand bird, right? Eheheh, so cuuute, so cuuute."

"(Liar! I'm using telepathy, you can hear me!)"

"No, I caaan't."

"(If you couldn't, you wouldn't reply!)"

She stroked my head. *Oho. That tickles; I almost made weird noises.*

"Erm, I believe Master is requesting that you release him."

"Oh, really? But I was just about to stick him in my cleavage. Right here, where it would be super comfy."

"I request that you cease."

At Narikin's urging, Rokufa released me. Thankfully I avoided learning what she planned to do with me in her cleavage. I settled back on Narikin's head.

"(Bleh... Rokuko's been so, how do I say this, aggressive lately... It's hard for me to keep up.)"

Toi extended a hand as I put my feathers back into place. “Regarding that, Lord Keima. May I speak?”

“(Go ahead.)”

“It is common in Pavella bars for men to speak of how unusually sexy the nuns are in Goren. Perhaps they are responsible?”

“(You think the Succubi are a bad influence on her...?)”

“Indeed. After all, dungeons are influenced by the concepts surrounding them.”

Hm? I tilted my tiny bird head.

“(By influence, you mean in that way? Like, divine influence?)”

“Indeed. After all, dungeons are demigods, and naturally they would be swayed even by their reputation. Were you... unaware of this?”

“(...What?)”

The gods of their world all had their own dominion. Since Dungeon Cores were demigods, you could say they ruled over their own dungeons... Yeah, okay, that made sense. Thinking back, I got the feeling her taste in wine, beds, food, and even her intelligence to begin with was under the dungeon’s influence.

“(Right. In our case, the whole town is part of the dungeon.)”

“I believe her own personality remains the dominant force, but she certainly is being influenced.”

Which meant, in short, Rokuko’s aggressiveness lately was in part due to, what... the dungeon, or rather the town, getting an increasingly perverted reputation? That was why I was suffering so much lately? I glanced at Rokufa (Rokuko).

“My head is kind of spinning... It’s like I just got drunk,” she said.

“That would be because we are in a boat. The ground shakes beneath us,” Narikin explained helpfully.

“A boat journey... Oh wait, this means we’re on the sea? I’ve played at a

beach before, but this is my first time being on open water. I want to take a peek outside.”

“Then may I suggest returning tomorrow afternoon? It is presently nighttime, and it is hard to see in the dark on open water, so we are forbidden for safety reasons from going onto deck.”

Rokufa and Narikin were having their own chat while Toi and I talked. It was probably my imagination that she felt oddly sexy, but... For now, I would need to make sure the nuns changed outfits before their Succubus power morphed them into something sexier. Frequency would be key here.

I ended the possession and returned to the dungeon’s Master Room, where Rokuko was sleeping defenselessly beside me. I was *pretty* sure she hadn’t been there when I went to sleep.

Rokuko’s eyes shot open, then looked at me with her shapely blue eyes and smiled.

“Morning, Keima. You shouldn’t go off on your own like that; call me first.”

“Eh, they said they were traveling by ship today, remember? I figured the meeting would be over in a snap.”

“Jeez! Why do you even think we got Rokufa in the first place? Good grief,” Rokuko said with a point, spinning her silky blonde hair around a finger.

If rumors about the town have this much of an effect, rumors about the dungeon must be even more influential. I’m gonna have to keep this in mind when making the dungeon from now on. Which means, in short, Neruneh’s slutty idea is going right in the trash. Yep.

* * *

I spent the next few days observing the wide-open sea with Rokufa (Rokuko) and advancing dungeon renovations, until eventually Narikin’s group reached the port city Pashiri in the Holy Kingdom. We had successfully entered the country, and could still possess them without a hitch. Our investigation could finally begin. Rokuko and I possessed Narikin and Rokufa, then stood on Holy Kingdom land.

“My wife, we have finally reached the Holy Kingdom,” I intoned.

“Mhm, we sure have, darling!”

The Holy Kingdom’s buildings, or at least Pashiri’s buildings, were white, square buildings made out of what looked like mortar—not too different from Pavella’s, except in one way. I saw quite a few temple-esque pillars with vertical ridge decorations.

That, and the people’s clothes and faces looked a lot different, too.

“Is this supposed to be Greece?” I asked aloud.

“What are you talking about? This is the Holy Kingdom.”

It seemed the common clothing in the Holy Kingdom was like wrapping white curtains around oneself in a style reminiscent of ancient Greece. The bulk of people on the main street were wearing toga-esque outfits. Narikin’s group had changed clothes before getting off the ship, so they were wearing the same. Toi had acquired them, and thanks to that we blended right in.

“We would’ve stuck out like a sore thumb with our normal clothes... Bleh, I can feel the breeze on my crotch,” I said.

“You do normally wear pants... or armor, I suppose, in Narikin’s case?”

Feels like I’m wearing a skirt. Though I mean, I do have underwear on. Duh.

“My lord, my lady, the higher in status one is within the Holy Kingdom, the more frilly their clothing becomes,” Toi said, still wearing the simple maid outfit she had gotten in Pavella. It seemed that was good enough for servants.

“Oh. I suppose that means we’re fairly high in status, then?” Rokufa asked.

“As acute as ever, my lady. You appear exceptionally arrogant, especially with the pet birds.”

“Arrogant? Really...?” I muttered. Still, it was only we humans who had such cloth-heavy outfits.

The smattering of beastkin I could see trailing behind people wearing similar clothes to us were wearing only pants. The men were half-naked, with the women wearing strips of cloth to cover their breasts, in what could be called

the quintessential look for a slave. Their dead eyes went well with that. The elves were wearing pretty shoddy clothing as well. Dwarves... did not seem to be here. Nor any people-like monsters like the Demon Realm had.

In turn, all of the nonhumans were universally wearing slave collars.

“Seems like their human supremacism wasn’t just for show.”

“Indeed. In this country, some elves and the like are allowed to be servants, but beastkin are all slaves. There is even a law that for a free beastkin to walk down the streets is illegal, with their punishment being immediate enslavement.”

“Seriously? We’re not gonna end up as criminals for breaking some law we didn’t know about, right?”

“I believe you will be fine, as this country is reasonably kind to humans. I will interject if I believe there will be problems.”

In any case, it seemed that beastkin even wearing half-decent clothes in this country earned leery looks. Frilly, fancy clothing was out of the question. They would say to their face, “Why’re you wearing better clothes than people, you animal?!” Beastkin were at best sex toys and at worse meat shields or food for monsters. Didn’t matter whether they were dog beastkin, lizard beastkin, or what. Avians (beastkin with wings) were treated especially harshly since they were seen as insulting Angels, the servants of the God of Light.

...Man, Beastkin sure are treated like trash here. No surprise they all have dead looks in their eyes.

Mm? Hang on, I feel like Toi’s outfit will stick out a lot then. She’s a beastkin after all... Or wait, now that I look, her tail and ears are gone.

“Huh. What happened to your ears and tail?”

“I erased them with a magic brew known as kemonocution. Naturally, they are of the Chaos brand. Oh, and fear not. There will be no problem if the deception is revealed, and it is not illegal either. As you can see, I am wearing a collar, as is required of me,” Toi said with a smile, pointing at the collar that didn’t even work on her. She truly was a slave in name only.

She was the one taking the lead here as she guided us down the road. Either she had been here before, or she was just fearless, but either way she was a reliable ally here in this unknown land.

“Oh yes, you two. You are noble adventurers, granted the status of Class-Two citizens. The ranks were easy to prepare officially due to your baronage in the empire. Glad that you are not Semi Class-Two citizens, no?”

“What’s the difference between them?”

“Class-Two citizens can sue Class-One citizens, which makes them more convenient in general.”

Which means Semi Class-Two citizens can’t sue no matter what happens? That must be the difference between commoners and nobles, alright. I get it.

“That said, humans are rarely exposed to violence, so I don’t believe it will be relevant. And if something does happen, just mutter to yourself, ‘Bleh, this is a waste of time, I just wanna fuck up some dungeons,’ as if those were your true feelings. That will solve most incidents peacefully,” she said. Rokufa (Rokuko) and I exchanged glances, not really sure if that was a joke or not, and continued following her.

Eventually, we reached the inn we were staying the night at. We were guided to our rooms, which were decorated just like Pavella’s rooms and had equally hard beds.

“So, what’s the plan?” I said.

“Erm, my lord? I believe that is your decision. Why did we come to the Holy Kingdom in the first place?” Toi asked rhetorically.

Why did we, again? Oh, er, just kidding. Of course, I remember.

“Sightseeing, right?” Rokufa(ko) suggested.

“No, it’s a job from Haku. Why’re you making this a honeymoon?” I poked her cheek. “Anyway, hopefully somewhere is blatantly suspicious. We gotta go gather some intel.”

“In which case, I do have some valuable intelligence. Artificial dungeons are known in this country as ‘properly managed dungeons.’ I shall search for them

as well. In the meantime, there is something I would like for the two of you to do. May I ask?" Toi said.

"What, you want us to take guild quests here?"

"No. Sightseeing," Toi said, with a nasty grin.

It was more efficient to gather information in places with plenty of people. In other words, it was important to go to places with many people—tourist spots. Which meant going sightseeing. Apparently.

Narikin and Rokufa did both have adventurer credentials, so they could take work at the Holy Kingdom's adventurer guild equivalent (which cooperated with the Empire's to ensure equal ranks), but... We didn't want to get injured while doing work unrelated to Haku's job, so even if we did do that it would only be those on the easier side.

Sightseeing it is, then? Well, we came all this way. Might as well relax and enjoy the Holy Kingdom a bit.

* * *

We left the Holy Kingdom's Pashiri and returned to Goren.

I left the chief residence with my pillow, figuring that going on walks occasionally would be a good idea. On the map, I had a perfect place for napping in the sun alone. It was a wonderful backyard-esque location that I had had my eyes on for a long time.

I brushed aside some undergrowth, found the shade, and set up my perfect sleep spot.

"Whew, another day of peace in Goren. Time to sleep," I said aloud.

"...Do you really think so?"

"Guh?!"

I hurriedly looked up and saw a Wraith... or rather, Dolce.

"What's the big idea?"

"Nothing, just... You sure nap a lot. You forgot that the assassins are still coming, haven't you?"

“N-No? Look, I’m heroically letting myself be bait.”

“Mhm, then you should have contacted me first. Haku assigned me to be a bodyguard, you know...” Dolce let out a heavy, exasperated sigh. *Erm, sorry?*

“But wait, no, I thought assassins hadn’t come for a while?”

“Your pup just hunted one at home. She’s a good guard dog.”

Seriously? And Niku took care of them? Guess I’ll need to send some words of congratulation.

“Oh, by the way, Keima. How is your investigation in the Holy Kingdom going?”

“My subordinates did safely reach the Holy Kingdom. No problems with possessions.”

“Good, then. Oh, also, the assassin spilled a bit of intelligence,” Dolce said, handing over some papers. I would share the intel with Narikin’s group at today’s scheduled report or something.

“I will dispose of them on my own. Now then, if you’ll excuse me. You may rest in peace, as you were. I will keep a close guard over you. Consider the sleep paralysis I provide a nice bonus.”

“I think it’ll actually make it harder for me to sleep...”

Incidentally, she actually did give me sleep paralysis. That was kind of a valuable life experience in a way... But anyway. I gave the intelligence to Narikin’s group as soon as I could, at the report.

“(Seems like there was some bigwig in Underling that tried to assassinate me. We don’t need to kill them in turn or anything, but we might as well check it out.)”

“The city of Underling, you say? Master, what a coincidence. We have already gone to Sunblessed after today’s intelligence gathering,” Narikin said with a nod. They were staying in an inn with bigger beds than yesterday’s inn—it seemed that was because they had mobilized on some intelligence. They sure were motivated. “According to Toi’s intelligence, Underling was a city limited exclusively to humans despite having the motto of, ‘All are equal beneath the

light of God.' Is that correct, Toi?"

"Indeed. And as they say, the more one speaks of equality, the more suspicious they are."

"(Yeah, they tend to be the most prejudiced.)"

And on top of that, Underling was gathering people by extolling that Class-Two and Class-Three commoners could work equally there. They asked a bit further, and learned that it was likely they had a hidden dungeon.

"I had thought we would first go to the holy capital Orka Zeri, but it seems this might be more efficient," Toi concluded.

"(Alright. Keep on heading to Underling, then.)"

"Understood, Master."

The three of them bowed at me (in my bird form).

"(...By the way, what's going on here?)"

"By which you mean...?"

"(Rokufa, er, not wearing much, and being so close...?)"

Indeed. I had been pointedly looking at only Narikin and Toi, but Rokufa was... barely wearing anything and sitting on the side of the extra-large bed, likely sized for couples to sleep together. And beside her was Narikin. I had been staring his way, but well, er. They likely planned to sleep right after the report and magic stone replenishment, but regardless of whether Rokuko was inside I didn't know where to look, and since she was basically Rokuko's twin, er, well, it was rough.

Guessing my thoughts, Toi grinned. "Oh, my my. You do know these two are a married couple, yes? There is nothing strange at all about a wife wearing a dressing gown to bed. Is there anything wrong with them being so close...? Ah! Oh, I see, my apologies for not noticing sooner. My lady, you are Keima's belongings. You should remove the rest."

"My mistake. If you'll excuse me," Rokufa said, attempting to strip even further at Toi's prompting. I hurriedly stopped her.

“No! The opposite, opposite! I’m saying I don’t want you to expose that much skin! Toi, if you mess around too much I’ll make you pay!”

“Oooh, so scary. Ahahaha!”

Good grief, you sound like Leona. Though Leona would be even worse about it.

“(Narikin, you need to stop her from being so shameless, too.)”

“Hrm, I do? Rokufa, put this on for now,” Narikin said, taking a cardigan out from his {Storage} and placing it on Rokufa’s shoulders.

Yeah, he looked pretty chad there. He has my face, but he’s a lot cooler right now. Bleh.

“Shameless? But Lady Rokuko said I may only show my skin to my husband, Narikin, and you, Master. I considered myself to be quite a chaste wife, but was I mistaken?”

Dungeon monsters sure are a bit messed up in the head... Oh wait, or is Rokufa’s thinking more normal? I glanced at Toi.

“Mm. I believe her thinking would be fairly universal in the Holy Kingdom, and among followers of the Church of Light. After all, this is polyamory, and a wife that shows her skin to only two men would be quite docile indeed.”

“(Polyamory, like, both ways? I think I might remember the High Priestess Alca saying something like that.)”

“As long as they have the resources, and all partners agree, the law says nothing against it. It is common even among Class-Two and below citizens to enter dungeons as a party, and end up a family.”

In the Holy Kingdom, it was normal for each family unit to have multiple husbands and wives, with them forming more of a collective than what most would consider a family. And for those particularly skilled, they could even get a harem (or a reverse harem).

“(Feels like that would cause problems with succession.)”

“The children born are raised as the children of all. This country’s culture prioritizes education and skill over bloodline, so there are no significant problems.”

Although blood wasn't entirely irrelevant, successors tended to be the more skilled and educated children. Seemed better than just blindly using the eldest child each time.

Furthermore, as for dungeon parties... Apparently their coordination enhanced significantly once they became a family. No longer would parties split due to relationship issues. Raising a child was also easier with so many people. The children would be educated by each of their parents, each of whom would specialize in different areas due to their party role, and from there the child would choose a role that fit themselves... There was a lot of good here, it seemed.

I had thought this was all just a rule for bigwigs to make legal harems, but in fact it was logical.

“(I dunno what to say... The system kinda makes it clear how determined they are to destroy dungeons.)”

“It might also be a byproduct of their desire to minimize conflict among human children to further feed into human supremacism.”

True. It was easy to tell beastkin children apart from human children regardless. And beastkin would be better suited to combat roles. If one wanted a party for conquering a dungeon, having better balance would be essential for fast progress.

Okay, yeah, the Holy Kingdom is something else.

“Also, Lord Keima. The empire similarly has a system for nobles to have multiple husbands and wives, although commoners are limited to just one.”

“(Now that's something I'm more familiar with. Rokufa, don't get too infected by the Holy Kingdom. We're only here on an infiltration mission.)”

“Ah! I-I see. That is the problem, I understand. As you wish,” Rokufa said, bowing her head after firmly putting the cardigan on.

You're pushing your boobs together and highlighting your cleavage as you do that, y'know. Seriously, be more careful.

I ended the possession and returned to Goren. Today I tried possessing them

from an inn room rather than the Master Room. Then I noticed someone was inside my futon. They felt highly familiar, and a peak showed Niku had infiltrated it. She had come to serve as my bodyguard-slash-dakimakura. What a hard worker.

Anyway, it had been bedtime in the Holy Kingdom, and it was bedtime here. I decided to just go right to sleep with Niku.

“Nnm... Master...?”

“Oh, did I wake you up? My bad.”

“No, I was already awake...” Niku mumbled, but given how she was nuzzling her face against me sleepily, that probably wasn’t the case. She clearly was just waking up.

“By the way, Niku, Dolce told me you captured an assassin? Good job.”

“Yes,” Niku said as I stroked her hair. She wagged her tail and gave proud sniffs. As always, she was great at conveying emotions with everything but her face. That was in sharp contrast to Toi, who always wore a smile but kept her emotions hidden.

“I think you deserve some kind of reward. What do you want?”

“More dakimakura work?”

“Nah, I mean, you always do that anyway. I’m thinking, more like... making something out of orichalcum, maybe. What would you want?”

I was making a thumb-sized orichalcum Golem with regularity using the Boss Spawner that Father had given me in the past. It wouldn’t be too hard to make an accessory out of it.

“In that case, I would like a knife... Orichalcum is light, isn’t it?” Niku asked.

“What if I made only the blade and tip out of orichalcum? That would make the weight equivalent, and only the sharpness and hardness would be different.”

“That, then.”

“Roger. Guess I’ll make two since you dual-wield.”

“Could I have four? With Soto making two copies.”

“We could have the Kobolds use copied knives. Sure.”

It was rare for Niku to ask for so much, and I easily nodded.

And with that, I used a bit of {Create Golem} to modify the orichalcum. I replaced the edge and tip of an iron knife with orichalcum. Basically like retempering a sword, although no tempering had been done. Incidentally, some people had a bias against tempered swords, since they often were fragile and fell apart. In short, since orichalcum was the absolute opposite of fragile, this would become the strongest blade.

“Now I just need to finish it...”

Orichalcum was too hard to sharpen, so I had to make the blade part as well... I just softened it, then pincerred it from both sides to make it thin. I finished the job by making it maintain the thinness. *Should I make it a Golem Blade as well? Meh, I guess I will.*

“There, done. My time?”

“Four in thirty minutes. Superb.”

“Here you go, then.”

“Thank you, Master.”

Niku’s tail wagged happily as she slid them into her sheaths. *A loli rejoicing over receiving weapons, hm...? I think I might have raised her slightly wrong.*

* * *

“So this is it, huh?” I said.

“It’s quite a wheat field,” Rokufa-ko replied. We were visiting Underling while possessing Narikin’s group, and found it was an affluent city surrounded by grain just like the north of Tsia. However, unlike the flat plains of north Tsia, there were many tiny hills dotting the landscape, causing the fields to rise and fall with them. Rokufa-ko put a hand over her eyes and whistled while peering down at the fields of wheat. Glad to see she was having fun.

But in any case, arriving was only the first step. I needed to think of how to

actually start the investigation somehow.

“That reminds me,” Rokufa-ko said. “Dolce mentioned how the field sizes were mismatched with their exports and internal consumption. Maybe we should investigate that.”

“C’mon, if you know stuff like that, you gotta share it right away.”

Don’t tell me that they’re using how annoying it is to calculate field size as an anti-spy method.

“In that case, my lord,” Toi said, stepping forward. “Might I suggest visiting the merchant’s guild? I believe they might speak to you if you say you are investigating the possibility of importing Holy Kingdom grain.”

...Not a bad idea. Guess I’ll actually do that.

I entered the city, linking arms with Rokufa-ko, and followed the flow of people to the merchant’s guild. Toi, for some reason, knew exactly where it was.

As expected, the merchant’s guild was a square building in a Greek style. It was about two, three times bigger than any nearby building. I went inside, and saw golden vases, stone statues of macho men, and granite negotiating tables, among other things.

My eyes kinda hurt from all the white. Time to stare at the green plants just to rest them.

“They sure are making a lot of money,” Rokuko observed.

“I mean, they better. They’re the friggin’ merchant’s guild,” I replied. It was better for everyone involved here that an organization of merchants actually made money. Better that than having no backup to help when you actually needed the money.

Anyway, I went to the counter... Not. I sent Toi instead. If I went there myself instead of sending a servant despite my status, I would just be begging for them to look down on me.

Not long after, a guild employee came to greet me.

“Welcome to Underling’s merchant’s guild. I am Sentaku, the chief clerk. I am

told you wish to import grain from our humble city?" they said.

"Indeed," I replied, with as much noble dignity as I could muster. I sat on the sofa offered to me, on the other side of a granite table. Toi stood behind me, while Rokufa-ko sat beside me. Incidentally, Tran (Narikin) and Ceiver (Rokufa) were resting in the birdcage Toi was holding, which meant they would know everything we did.

"I do not like to waste time," I said curtly. "What is the maximum amount you are willing to sell?"

"The maximum? Hm... Given that this is our first trade, I would say one hundred bags. At a price of one gold."

"Hah! One gold coin should buy two hundred bags at the least. Is it the way of this country to cheat business partners from the start?"

"My my, forgive my rudeness, my lord."

And done. That exchange was just a normal merchant greeting here. A Holy Kingdom noble would generally purchase the initial offer without attempting to negotiate. It was a waste of money, but there was honor in helping the flow of money and goods, or something. Incidentally, Toi had explained all this to me ahead of time, as you might have guessed.

"I'm told you are a noble from the Laverio Empire, my lord. You wish to do business with the Holy Kingdom?"

"Not entirely; this is an aside as I travel with my wife for my honeymoon. I was a bit curious upon hearing that there was cheap grain to be had here," I said, hugging Rokufa-ko's shoulder to pull her closer to me. The way she squeaked and blushed was the very image of a new wife. Any outsider would immediately believe we were on our honeymoon.

"Naturally, if the quality is acceptable, I am considering regular imports."

"I see, I see. Though... You are on a honeymoon?"

"Indeed. It will grow much more difficult to travel once we have borne children. We simply wish to have what fun we can before then. Though I understand marriages are different in the Holy Kingdom."

And in reality, we already have a child in the form of Soto.

“Indeed, in our humble lands you may travel even upon giving birth. There are many institutions for looking after children. Perhaps you could consider moving to the Holy Kingdom for your children’s sake?”

“Ahaha, I have no intention of doing so at the current moment. We are always tied to our homeland in one way or another, as they say. Though perhaps I may consider it if I find the Holy Kingdom particularly attractive.”

And just like that, we probed each other’s intentions while sharing what seemed like pointless small talk. ...*Uh, Rokufa-ko, why’re you stiffening up and blushing?* I stealthily tapped her shoulder with my thumb, prompting her to say the lines we had agreed on.

“Ah! Erm, um, darling? I find this place kind of boring. I would like to go somewhere I can stand and move around.”

“Ah, my apologies. Wait just a moment, my dear. Ahem... Sentaku, was it? Give me two bags as a sample. One silver will do, yes?”

I took out a silver coin from my {Wallet} and lazily dropped it on the table.

“Yes, certainly. Do you possess {Storage}?”

“Of course.”

“Darliiing. Isn’t wheat alone a bit boring? Let’s buy other things, too. Right? Variety is the spice of dungeon conquering, no?”

“Right you are, dear. Hm... Add in some local food to the order. The rarer, the better. I hear many goods flow through Underling. Spend these five silvers as you see fit.”

I added more silvers, under the guise of Rokufa-ko’s begging. Sentaku smiled at the seven collective silvers, and slid one into his breast pocket.

“As you wish. Milady, Lord Narikin. Wait just a moment.”

“Do hurry now,” Rokufa-ko said. “Time is limited; a second wasted is a second that could have been spent in a dungeon.”

“Yes, do hurry.”

Sentaku stood up, called an employee, and headed to a different room.

Incidentally, the random idioms Rokuko was saying about dungeons were taken from the Church of Light bible. Toi had set this up for us. On paper, I was an imperial noble charmed by a devout Church of Light follower. That seemed fine to roll with if it meant smoother negotiations.

A bit later, Sentaku returned with two bags of wheat, one bag of soybeans, one bag of corn, and a bag of assorted fruits. Oranges, bananas, apples, melons, strawberries, grapes... *Ehhh, really makes me question how all of these are in season at once.* Maybe they have slaves learn {Storage}, then use them as time-stop refrigerators.

“Wooooow! There’s so much fruit!” Rokufa-ko exclaimed.

“Hm, does Underling have fruit gardens as well?” I asked.

“Indeed, at the edge of the city.”

I looked between the melons and strawberries. Both looked delicious, but...

“Some of these fruits are out of season, I believe. Incredible. How did you raise them?”

“The God of Light’s blessing. Though they do not last long and are unsuitable for most trade. These are freshly picked. What do you think, my lady?”

“They’re amazing! Dungeons really are trash, considering this is what the God of Light can do!”

“Ooh, you certainly understand, my lady! Many of these fruits can only be eaten here. Please consider Underling as a location for a villa.”

Wow, you’re really gonna bite that? She just had to call dungeons trash and you’re kneeling?

Anyway, he said they were freshly picked. Getting fruit out of season needed a greenhouse... and if not, then an artificial dungeon with fruit. Hopefully they weren’t poisoned somehow.

“I see. I did hear of the Holy Kingdom having proper dungeons, run by human hands... artificial dungeons, I believe?”

“Might I ask where you heard that...?” Sentaku asked, his eyes narrowing as he gave me a searching look.

“Count Lodol in Pavella told me. By his word, he received an artificial dungeon from High Priestess Alca. I have not seen him for some time, but I hear the town he established has been quite successful.”

“Oooh, I see,” he said, lowering his guard a bit when I brought up Count Lodol and Alca. It was the truth that Count Lodol had received an artificial dungeon, after all. Though the dungeon was now destroyed, the town was flourishing thanks to Cid, and I didn’t even know what had happened to Count Lodol.

Really, the Holy Kingdom might as well have made their artificial dungeons public the moment they took them out of the country and gave them to a loose-lipped noble like Count Lodol of all people. Bringing it up was completely safe.

“These fruits were gathered from a garden within an artificial dungeon, no? There are dungeons in our land as well, but natural ones, rather than artificial. We can never tell when they might become too much for us one day,” I said.

“Indeed, indeed, I imagine so. My sympathy for your struggles.”

“Incidentally, may I ask how I may obtain an artificial dungeon for myself...?”

Sentaku rubbed his nose. “I’m afraid I wouldn’t know. Aaah, but let me see, I might have... I feel I might know, if only there were something to jog my memory...” he said, creating a ring between his thumb and pointer finger, which he was using to squish his nose. That was the hand sign for coins. In short, he was bluntly asking for a bribe.

“Hrrrrm. Would this perhaps help?” I asked, placing a silver coin on the table.

“Ah, what a nice sound... Mm, I feel on the verge of remembering something important.”

“I see, I see. Perhaps this will help.”

Clink. Sentaku smiled and slid the two silvers into his pocket. “Aha, it’s all come back to me. Why, yes, I know. If you take a letter of introduction and go to the church within the city of Mastermind, you will find it easier to learn

more. Only trusted individuals give the letters of introduction, but between you and me, rumor is that Underling's merchant's guild writes them at times... Or not? I find it difficult to say for sure," he said, rubbing his nose further. Good grief. You really could buy trust in the Holy Kingdom for money. Though... In this case, perhaps he was testing whether I had a big enough wallet to afford the artificial dungeon.

"In that case, would it be possible to have them write one right away?" I asked, casually setting a gold coin on the table, as if indicating I was ready to go all the way.

Sentaku nodded with a bright smile upon seeing its golden glitter. "Indeed, indeed. Of course it is possible! Understood. Ahaha, you are quite the lucky one. In truth, I happen to have a personal connection here. Come again tomorrow at noon; I will have one ready."

"You have my thanks."

And so, negotiations were completed. According to Toi, a smaller tip would have led to the meeting coming several days later. Maybe that would have been better, so we could have spent more time sightseeing.

* * *

In any case, tomorrow arrived. We left getting the letter to Narikin and Rokufa until we had given a midway report to Haku. I thought that we could just send it via mail, but Haku strongly advised we give it to her directly so she could see Rokuko's face, so we set a table with a parasol in the [Ivory Beach] and had a tea party by the blue sea. It was a regal affair, with Chloe and Kinue serving our tea.

Haku and Rokuko elegantly sipped their black tea. Oh, what about Soto? She was sitting this one out. It was impossible to know what she'd do, and Haku hadn't specified that she should come, so obviously I left her. Last time she saw Haku, she did eat her tights at the first meeting. It was fine, regardless; Soto said she would have her own tea party with her friends back in town.

"Here's a map of Underling. We think the artificial dungeon will be here, in the field of fruit trees," I said, showing the map we had recorded through the monitor. It was a method Dolce had suggested, and it was better than trying to

redraw the map itself.

“Fruit-tree fields, hm? One of the people who hired the assassin to kill you is an investor for these fields,” Haku observed.

Wait, really?

“Though I have given the appropriate response, and so I suppose I should soon be using past tense there.”

“Oh, good! You can sleep easier now, Keima!” Rokuko said cheerfully.

“I mean, that’s just one of them. That means there’s more,” I said.

“Indeed, there certainly are more, Keima. I will thus continue having my subordinates stay in Goren to guard you,” Haku said with a smile. I wanted to refuse, but I really couldn’t, both in terms of them being useful guards and in terms of their real purpose being spying on me.

“So, how did you confirm they were using an artificial dungeon? I was suspicious of the fruit trees myself but did not yet have everything put together.”

“I directly asked if I could purchase an artificial dungeon. One gold coin bribe later and we were in.”

“A bold move... but not a bad one. Well done,” Haku said with a satisfied nod. It seemed she approved of our results.

“We got a letter of introduction, and we’ll be going to Mastermind later to learn more.”

“If possible, do obtain an artificial dungeon. I would like to take a look at one.”

“Got it.”

That felt kinda dangerous, but Haku probably wouldn’t do anything too bad.

“Naturally, I will cover any costs myself. Do say so if your own money will not cover it. And... Ah, yes. We do not want you to lack an answer if they ask where to send their staff. I will make this beach area Baron Narikin’s territory.”

And so, Narikin became a landowning noble. In a way, that put him above us,

since we were on Tsia land.

“And up Narikin goes,” Rokuko observed.

“Though his territory has exactly zero citizens.”

Still, you could say a newly risen baron suddenly became a landowning duke or something of the sort. Rokuko was right in that his status was shooting up.

That was Chloe’s cue to bring a bag of gold. War funds for purchasing the artificial dungeon, apparently. She set it on the table, such that the gleaming gold coins were visible. It was about as big as the bags Wataru would bring, so probably around one hundred coins were inside.

“Don’t be afraid to take it,” Haku said. “It is in part payment for the information you have brought us.”

“Er, right.”

This was still just a midway report, and we hadn’t found a trace of the actual factory for artificial dungeons, but that was still worth a hundred gold to them, apparently. It was easy to forget since Wataru dropped that much like it was nothing, but this was still a hundred million yen in Japanese terms.

“Isn’t this a bit much?” I asked.

“Not at all, your information will be quite useful. Hm... Remember this well, Keima. If you are stingy with rewarding results and information, then you will suffer greatly one day.”

“I’ll keep that in mind...”

Haku covered her mouth and laughed. *Information is valuable; don’t be cheap. Got it.*

With that in mind, perhaps it was time to reward Narikin’s group.

Side Chapter — Narikin and Rokufa's Time Off

"We may have some time off? And sightsee as we wish?" Narikin asked.

"(Yep. You can spend the next week however you like; it's all free time.)"
Keima, his master, replied through the bird he was possessing. Keima had given a report to his own superior, the top of the empire Haku, and upon receiving a reward, decided to share it with Narikin's group, it seemed. "(We sure rushed to Underling, after all, and we were never in much of a rush in the first place. Now's a good time to take a break. We can get back to work once we go to Mastermind. Alright?)"

"Understood, Master."

"(Also, Rokufa? As a special bonus, you two can use up to five golds however you like.)"

"Ah?! Th-Thank you."

"(Alright, that's it. Later.)" Keima ended the possession, and Tran returned to its birdcage on its own.

Rokufa let out a sigh. Five golds was enough for a family of commoners to live two, three years without working, if they spent wisely. Far too much for a week of tourism.

"Five whole golds for a week! Master must be very upset that Haku dealt with those that hired an assassin to kill him before we did. Don't you agree, Narikin?"

"Yeah. He said it's a special bonus, but we didn't do anything special. These five golds must be his way of saying: you have a week, here is your funding, show me results."

Toi, who was listening while standing aside by a wall, shook her head. She believed Keima had genuinely wanted to give them payment and a break. Heroes often lost their grasp on the value of money upon becoming nobility. They certainly did work worthy of the payment, but... Regardless. By Toi's

estimation, Keima had likely been paid around one hundred golds, and he had given five thinking nothing more than that it was a small portion of the overall payment. She then guessed the truth entirely by assuming he had thrown the week of time on since he felt guilty about giving just a mere five coins.

“My lady, my lord. Lord Keima is more genuine than you may think, and I believe it would be wise to take his words at face value; he most likely just wants you to rest,” Toi said, but the two of them collectively shook their heads on the spot.

“That can’t be right. Master himself obtained the information about artificial dungeons he reported to Haku. We only listened as birds, remember?”

“Indeed, and you, too, simply stood back with the birdcage, Toi. Surely you can understand that five golds would be excessive as a reward for such little labor, no?” Rokufa said.

“Oh? That makes it sound like I am being rewarded as well,” Toi said with surprise, which in turn made Rokufa and Narikin give their own looks of surprise.

“Of course. You may ultimately serve another, but we are coworkers here. Isn’t that right, Narikin?” Rokufa asked.

“Absolutely. Now, let’s all get together and think about how to spend these war funds. We’re counting on your input, Toi.”

Toi had thought for certain they were on guard against her, and that she was being used while they served as guards to keep an eye on her, but it seemed that was not the case. They viewed her as a coworker, and at that she could only shake her head with exasperation; they were soft, just like a certain someone else. Keima was a bit on guard against her, but in the end he was still being soft. After all, he was letting her walk free, and barely had any eyes on her. Toi scratched her head, deciding she would need to train both Keima and his servants for it to be worth it to serve him at all. She intended to put her all into these things, since Leona had directly told her to serve him.

“In that case, might I suggest we first explore how we can invest the gold to create more wealth from it?”

“Hm, so you suggest we start a business? We would need permission for that,” Narikin said.

“That would be useful for gathering intelligence, but we are not exactly merchants,” Rokufa said.

“Non, non. In this world, there is something known as gambling, and it exists even in Underling.”

That said, large-scale horse races and the like were held only once every few months. The only regular gambling was dice in bars, naturally.

“Gambling? I’m not a fan,” Narikin said.

“That runs the risk of losing money rather than earning it,” Rokufa agreed.

“However, it’s precisely in those sorts of places that information gathers. How about it? Perhaps it would be wise to consider it a part of the expenditures for this investigation.”

The two of them were stiff and formal, just like their master. Toi guided them into relaxing by framing it as a part of their work. Surely playing in a gambling den would serve as a good rest. Surely.

“Investigation... Ah, I see! I understand what you mean,” Rokufa said.

“Did you realize something, Rokufa?”

“Indeed. A gambling den would be a traditional spot to spend days off, no?”

“Ah...! I understand everything now! No doubt that’s exactly what Master meant!”

That wasn’t quite what she’d intended, but overall Toi’s goal had been accomplished. Still, there was no way Haku hadn’t already exhausted such an obvious source of information. Toi did not expect they would learn anything new there.

“Hmm, he said one week, so I suppose we may spend fifty silvers a day?” Rokufa suggested.

“Would it not be closer to eighty?” Narikin replied.

“Just to be clear, dividing five hundred silvers across seven days would be

seventy-one coins a day,” Toi said, flatly calculating it in a flash. Rokufa and Narikin were moved.

“In that case, we will take seventy per day as our funds. If we split that further between us...” Rokufa began, her eyes wandering.

“Thirty silvers each, then? Let us begin.”

“Twenty-three each, with one left over. However, I believe it would be more natural for the three of us to travel together. We make a solid trio, as husband and wife accompanied by a servant.”

Really, Toi thought this was a good opportunity to have them learn more about math. And... she was still a bit in disbelief that they actively wished to involve her in this mission. She looked at them, but their decision was firm. To think they had even planned to give her money and send her on a solo mission. They truly were far too soft.

“Fear not. We planned to have you bring Tran and Ceiver with you,” Narikin said.

“And what would you do if I set the birdcage down and ran away? Good grief.”

“My my. You would not run away when Master has instructed you to keep an eye on us, Toi.”

She certainly did not plan to run, but somehow these two were being so dangerously trusting that she wanted to anyway. But she wouldn’t.

“Let us save any money we win or have left over to return to Master,” Narikin suggested.

“Indeed. Now, Toi, show us where we might go to gamble,” Rokufa said.

“...Understood, my lady.”

And so, Toi brought the two of them to a gambling den for a break under the guise of gathering intelligence.

* * *

Days passed.

“Oho, now that is interesting,” Narikin said.

“Heheh, right? Now, about that deal we made...”

“Of course. I will share my tips.”

“Gahaha, I figured you knew what’s up! Yeehaw, now I can get back to gamblin’!”

They were at a gambling den set on a main street in the Holy Kingdom. Narikin had piled up his chips while drinking, and flicked three over (with each one being worth a silver each) to the information broker.

“Erm, my lord? I would not say the information you just bought was particularly worthwhile.”

“Hm? You think so?”

“Indeed. What use would knowing about a quest for a lost pet serve? I believe you may be too drunk.”

As per Toi’s observation, Narikin’s cheeks were certainly red. Narikin was a Living Armor, but for the sake of his investigation he was in human form. His human body was capable of getting drunk. Perhaps that was why he kept gathering exclusively useless information.

“However, isn’t it interesting how the pet alligator was almost eaten by the group that found it?”

“Is it?!”

“It’s an alligator. An alligator! Not to mention, the adventurer saved the alligator by buying it from them. Doesn’t it bring you to tears?! It cost a bit more than the quest’s pay! Ahahaha, apparently he bought it to avoid having to pay the fee for failing the quest. Adventurers sure have it rough. Though I’m technically one myself,” Narikin said.

“Well, if the quest was simply to find the pet, they could have charged the quest giver for the fee. The story would have been perfect if the conclusion was that it was all a scam meant to get money out of adventurers.”

“Oho, now that is interesting. Alright, you’ve earned a tip yourself, Toi.”

“Thank you...?”

Toi gave half-hearted replies as Narikin, in a good mood, gave her two chips. Well, this could still be considered a success overall, since they were taking a break.

“Still, I enjoy this roulette game. I simply do not run out of chips playing this,” Rokufa said, sitting next to Narikin and playing roulette (which was largely identical to the Earth game, since it was introduced by a Hero). After watching the dealer throw the ball, she set down half of her remaining chips (five) on the number 14.

“My lady, aggressive playing like that usually results in running out of coins immediately. Might I suggest betting more broadly?”

“It’s fine. I am sometimes right.”

...And indeed, the ball landed on 14. Her bet was multiplied by thirty-six, resulting in 180 total coins. The dealer wore a forced smile.

“See? I got more chips.”

“...I suppose.”

That was not her getting a portion of Rokuko’s luck. Rather, she was analyzing the ball’s trajectory with her eyes, and calculating where it would land. The Angel species had exceptionally powerful eyes for observation. It was meant to be used on the battlefield. Naturally, her predictions were not perfect, but she was right one out of five times.

The fact the roulette didn’t have a spoke running along the inside of it like Earth roulette made it easier to guess. One might as well say she was predicting the future.

If she bet half her coins each time, and won once every five times, she would indeed end up regaining her chips. And sometimes she got a double, which made for a veritable mountain of chips.

“The rules are so simple! You just have to guess which hole the ball will fall into,” Rokufa observed.

“There’s still plenty of fun to be had indeed,” Narikin replied, but he was

grinning mainly since her winning meant he got to continue gathering information. She had won big right as her diminishing chips had almost sent them home. Toi sighed; they would be here longer yet.

And indeed, all the information they were collecting was entirely worthless. Someone dropped a yellow handkerchief, a mouse dug a hole into some wall, the owner of an item shop was cheating, and so on—nothing to do with their current investigation. What exactly was Narikin’s plan, buying information about the best brothels in the red light district? Even if he reported it to Keima, the only response he would get was an evasive “G-Good to know.”

The only relevant piece of information was that an investor in the fruit field had suddenly died. That was likely one of those who had tried to assassinate Keima, only to be dealt with by Haku. No doubt the corpse was a dummy, while the real person was being tortured. Or so Toi presumed, in any case.

“Now now, my beloved wife won again! Truly, we have been blessed by the goddess of fortune... Is there anyone who would like some of that luck to rub off on them? Give me a story, any stories my wife will find amusing!” Narikin declared.

“Boss, boss! Buy my story!”

“No, mine! Buy mine!”

“Ahaha, line up now, good fellows. Speak your part.”

If Rokufa had simply been earning a killing on the roulette, they would have been kicked out in the blink of an eye, but since Narikin was showing off and handing out the chips like candy, the den was letting it happen. There was an odd balance being struck.

And to take it further, the chips Narikin distributed were immediately gambled away back to the store by the customers. The improved activity meant the den was actually earning more than usual. The den was, overall, benefiting from them. Narikin’s group were spending about twenty-five silvers each day themselves.

Though even with that much spending, they still weren’t going through the seventy-one coins they initially planned to use each day, so upon returning to

the den they bemoaned not meeting their quota.

“Good grief, what a ridiculous couple... Wait a second.”

Toi shook her head. Why was she getting so serious about information gathering when this was all just an excuse to get them to take a break in the first place? Sheesh. Spending time with those two truly messed with her head.

“...I suppose I should enjoy this break as well. Excuse me, waiter. Fruits, please.”

Toi paid the chips she just received to a waiter, who gave her grapes. She popped one into her mouth and drank the sweet juice.

Side Chapter — Soto's Tea Party

Keima's daughter, Soto, had fit into the town of Goren with no issues whatsoever. And now, she was having a tea party to increase her number of friends. It was being held in the Dancing Doll Inn's dining hall. If one avoided the lunch rush, there were plenty of seats and snacks free. A table had tea, purins, and local golem beets to eat lined up atop it.

Participating in the tea party alongside Soto was the gang of Goren's children: Niku, Maiodore, and Michiru, as well as Cid, the town chief of Dragg.

"I'm papa's daughter, Soto Goren! Feel free to just call me Soto!" Soto exclaimed, introducing herself without a hint of shyness. Each word exuded excessive self-confidence.

"I am Maiodore Tsia. Lady Kuro is my fiancée," Maiodore said, bowing her head. She was the daughter of Tsia's archduke, and had more common sense than anyone else there.

"I am Michiru! An apprentice nun in the local church! I think we'll be great friends!" Michiru exclaimed in turn, smiling brightly. She was like a tiny energetic sun, and was immediately likable.

"Should I really be here? I'm Cid Pavella. Town chief of Dragg," Cid said, feeling a bit awkward as the only guy there.

"...I will introduce myself, too. I am Niku Kuroinu," Niku said. She knew everyone there, but would feel bad to be the only one not to introduce herself.

"Here, have socks as a symbol of our friendship! Don't worry, they're all new and from the dungeon."

"Oh my. Thank... you...?" Maiodore was the first to receive new socks from Soto. They were laid bare without any wrapping, but they were certainly high quality.

"I would sure be grateful if you put them on right away! Oh, and here's a box for putting your old socks."

“Soto. Master said not to do that here.”

“Ngh, sis... Curse you, papa...”

Niku smoothly stopped Soto from going out of control with her fetishes. Her bizarre behavior... that is, her fetish for collecting socks, had been mostly permitted up until this point, but that was only true with family—Keima’s subordinates, Niku and Ichika, the monster girls, *etc.* Naturally, going all out with outsiders was a bit much. Thanks to Niku, it seemed the tea party could safely begin.

“Lady Soto, you are Lady Kuro’s little sister, correct?” Maiodore asked.

“Uh-huh! That’s right, Mai-mai. I’m her little sister, eheheh... Oh, and you’re her fiancée. I guess that means I should call you big sis, too!”

“B-Big sis...! Y-Yes, indeed! Oh my, how cute and wise and clever you are. You are certainly Lord Keima’s daughter.”

And so, Maiodore was immediately conquered.

“Still, to think Keima had another daughter. How about you call me your big sister-in-law, too?”

“Wait, you wanna be called sister even though you’re a boy? That’s pretty funny!” Soto exclaimed, interested, but Maiodore stepped in.

“Lord Cid? Do not be obsessive; Lady Kuro has already refused your engagement.”

“Ahaha, I was simply joking.”

“That’s right! Cid is my prey!”

“M-Michiru?!”

“Hm? Oh my my my. Things have developed that much between you?” Maiodore asked, putting a hand on her mouth and giggling.

Michiru finished changing her socks, then spoke to Soto. “Soto, Soto!”

“Yees, Michimichi?”

“Are you a Beddhist?”

“Uh-huh! I’m a Beddhist!”

“Yaaay!”

“Yaaay!”

Soto and Michiru high-fived. They were immediately in complete sync. And while Niku couldn’t see, Michiru took off her socks and gave them to Soto.

“I ask for your support in upcoming church-related business.”

“Geheheh, what a bad girl. Fear not... I will speak to papa.”

It was quite a villainous-looking exchange. The fact it was an exchange of socks rather than adult candy did make it heartwarming, though. And they were just doing it for fun; they didn’t have any actual evil plans. Probably.

“What are those two doing... Did they meet in secret before? It’s like they’re peas in a pod... Is this really their first meeting?” Maiodore asked, exasperated.

“It sure is! Soto, yaaay!”

“Michimichi, yaaay!”

Soto and Michiru high-fived again. They were so in sync it was as if they had been friends from birth.



“...Still, the purins in this inn are certainly high quality. I am using the recipe to make my own at home, but they simply can’t compare,” Maiodore said.

“Say what?! Mai, when did you get the recipe?!” Cid shouted, so jealous he abruptly stood up.

“Ohoho. I am Lady Kuro’s fiancée, you know.”

“Hm? But you can eat them here whenever you want, can’t you?”

“Yeah, but... Going through the tunnel each time is kind of a pain,” Cid said. “But I can’t eat them unless I do. It’s been a bit annoying.”

“Why not just use {Storage}?”

Things put into {Storage} had their time stopped. You could just buy them and eat them when you wanted to.

“That’s an option, but... When I have to go to the imperial academy, whether my chefs can make purins or not will make a big difference, no?”

“The imperial capital certainly is far away,” Maiodore agreed.

“Hiring adventurers with {Storage} just to bring food is an option, but the costs are as high as you’d expect.”

“What about asking Wataru?” Niku suggested. Cid blinked.

“Wataru the Hero wouldn’t do menial labor like that, surely.”

“He would. You just have to ask.”

“Don’t worry, big sis! Wataru definitely would!” Soto exclaimed.

One of Wataru’s jobs was to bring rice from Goren to the imperial capital. They were actually using dungeon functions to dump a ton of it over there, but they were using Wataru to cover most of that up. (Exporting rice through the [Ivory Beach] was one of the [Cave of Greed’s] most important cash flows.)

“Hrm... The socks of Wataru the Hero, who travels across the empire... Pretty hot.”

“Soto.”

“I-I know! Not today, not today!”

Niku put her foot down.

“Niku, I don’t mind!” Michiru exclaimed. “I accept Soto’s love, that’s what it means to be a Beddhist nun! Heck yeah!”

“Michimichi, you’re so cute! I love you!”

Soto and Michiru hugged in a tight embrace. Were they really meeting for the first time?

“Excuse me, Michiru! What did I say about calling Lady Kuro by that name?!” Maiodore barked.

“...But I prefer that name.”

“No, no, Lady Kuro! It’s shameless...! O-Once we get married, erm, I will call you by that name in bed, so... Until then, please be patient!” Maiodore went red. It was... easy for Keima’s group to forget, but ‘niku’ did indeed have a sexual connotation when used as a name for women.

“Hey, hey, Soto. Mai smells super nice.”

“Uh-huh, she’s uber cute! I love this kinda stuff!”

“I really should be a second wife...”

“Hey! What are you three talking about?!”

“...Does anyone want another purin?”

And so, Soto was accepted normally—normally...?—as the town chief’s daughter.

Chapter 2

I gave Narikin's group time off and a bonus, but they spent that time gathering information. I listened to their report while possessing Tran.

“(You sure are dedicated to your work, huh?)”

“Your praise is the highest honor.”

Why *were* all my subordinates so dedicated to work? Rei was the same way. All I wanted to do was skip work and sleep, so where was the dedication coming from?

“In short, we religiously attended gambling dens to gather information, and learned much. I believe we have learned every rumor circulating the city. We have written everything in these documents.”

“(I see, I see. Well, you sure did manage to learn a lot of... different things.)”

“It is all thanks to Rokufa and Toi. I simply distributed the pay,” Narikin said.

“Oh no no, it is thanks to you and Toi, Narikin. I simply had fun with gambling,” Rokufa replied.

“I suppose the credit all falls to me, then, Keima. I am the one who encouraged them, after all.”

“(Er, sure. Good work, you three.)”

They might have dug out some info, so I recorded each sheet one by one to check later. For now I would just skim over them.

“(You know, you all should rest when you're given breaks. If you work on holidays, you'll be giving Beddhism a bad name.)”

“Indeed, we did go to the gambling den since we were on holiday. It was fairly relaxing,” Narikin said.

“Yes, Master. The information just came to us on its own,” Rokufa agreed. I looked at the maid, who had no doubt told them to give those excuses.

“If I had not said anything, these two would have done actual work,” she said defensively.

“(R-Right. Sorry for the trouble...?)”

“You should be, good grief. But this, too, is for Lady Leona’s sake, so I will do it gladly,” she said. It seemed she was doubling down and indeed congratulating herself for everything.

I glanced at the notes, and the intelligence they had gathered really was all over the place. Adultery, dropped handkerchief, places to get fruit for cheap, *etc.* Oh, the owner of a fruit field died? Rest in peace; not that I care.

“(Narikin, if you found any bombshells or things especially interesting, drop ‘em on me.)”

“Ah, in that case, errrm. Yes. This one,” he said, pointing at a particular note.

“(Let’s see here... A female adventurer used a magic potion to become male and grow stronger. However, she fell in love with a man, so she returned to being a girl, gave birth, then returned to being male? That’s certainly something,)” I said. Their gender flipped like three times in quick succession.

“When I heard the story myself I could not believe what a bold man, er, woman? I don’t know which to say, but they were certainly something indeed. I believe they are a celebrity that has conquered a dungeon before as well,” Narikin replied.

They were definitely using a Chaos drug. Guess that means Leona’s been here, too. Not that that means anything in particular, given how long she’s been traveling.

“(Still, to think they’d use sex-changing drugs that openly. Though I imagine anyone who conquers a dungeon can do pretty much whatever they want.)”

“Master, I am told drugs of that nature are not regulated whatsoever in the Holy Kingdom,” Narikin said.

“(Wait, really?)”

In the empire, drugs which changed one’s gender or body in dramatic fashion were heavily regulated. Reason being, they were most often used by criminals.

Though one could easily acquire them if they had a succession dispute and petitioned the empire for such.

“Indeed. It’s in my notes,” Narikin said, taking out a sheet of paper.

“(Let’s see here... *The One-Night of Sex Change Party*. ‘To you who wishes to experience madness and pleasure once a month. Participation fee of twenty silvers. The prepared drug will take effect for one night...’ I see. Huh, you even got info on red-light-district events. Not bad.)”

“Yes, Master! I am honored. This event in particular seems to have caused quite a stir on the day after it was first held. Ahahaha.”

I imagine so, the medicine only lasts for one night. I guess they must have countermeasures in place now.

“(Where’s this event being held, anyway...? Oh, nice, it’s in Mastermind.)”

“Are you interested? I will gladly lend you my body,” Narikin said.

“Master. If you wish to be a woman, you do not need to rely on medicine; please do possess my body,” Rokufa said. They were both pushing their bodies forward as I looked at the flier.

“(I was just curious about where they were getting the drugs from.)”

“Hrm, I see.”

“I’m kind of disappointed...”

Besides, I have {Ultra Transformation}. I can be a girl anytime I want.

In any case, with events like this being casually held every month without regulation, one could see how easy it was to get magic drugs. Though even here, one with permanent effects would still cost a thousand golds or so.

“(Toi, is it easy to make sex-changing drugs?)”

“No. An alchemist would need to hone their craft to its absolute perfection just to have a hope of crafting such a drug. And even with such an alchemist, twenty silvers would not be enough to cover the costs. It is more likely they simply have a dungeon that produces the drugs,” Toi replied.

“(What’re the chances that Leona has a dungeon in the Holy Kingdom?)”

“It is possible, but why would she?”

“(Do you think Leona would need a reason to do something?)”

She was the kind of person who would act simply on a whim. It was impossible to predict what she would do. I could easily imagine her dumping a subdungeon that produced sex-changing drugs for no reason.

“Apologies; I understand completely. You truly do understand Lady Leona well.”

“(Well, for now I’ll just assume they have an artificial dungeon for it,)” I said, cutting the conversation short. “(Anyway, Narikin, Rokufa. Go to Mastermind next. And actually rest on your breaks next time.)”

“Understood, Master.”

“We will rest thoroughly.”

I got the feeling they would keep working regardless, but if they insisted I didn’t see much point in trying to stop them. As long as they didn’t kill their bodies doing it.

* * *

I made progress on modifying the dungeon, and finished the fake door Rei had suggested just as Narikin’s group arrived at the city of Mastermind. They stayed at the inn, and the next day Rokuko and I possessed them.

I looked around the city in Narikin’s body, and... it seemed to consist of a bunch of black square buildings decorated as if black curtains were hanging over them. The curtains were probably stone carvings, given how they didn’t blow in the wind, and they were fairly frilly. On the other hand, the people walking down the streets generally wore white curtains like everywhere else. It felt bizarre, like I had wandered into a world of monochrome.

“(The city of Mastermind is based on a master of the mind many years ago who created a black dye to make black curtains which he hid behind. I’m told that black dye is a specialty product here, and so most homes use black curtains,)” Narikin told me through telepathy, while possessing Tran within the birdcage. He had become a valuable source of information after all that time in

the gambling den. It seemed he had used the experience he got there to gather intelligence about Mastermind.

“I see. So they’re showing off their specialty product.”

“(Incidentally, this cloth, which hardens in response to magic, is another specialty product. I hear it becomes as stiff and strong as armor.)”

“Huh, neat.”

The inn we walked out of happened to be shrouded in the black cloth. I tapped it, and it gave some solid thunking sounds without moving. It felt like something which had been soaked and hardened with glue.

“Pretty light, though. This could make for some decent armor,” I observed.

“It returns to a soft state when exposed to a special substance, which makes repairing it simple, though the substance is black as well.”

“Kind of a shame. Though it’s impressive that they made so much with just black.”

Stiff and strong cloth, huh? I might be able to fit this into my Wearable Golems. Also... I could get perfect recreations of feet if I made black tights or knee socks out of them, huh? Actually, no, taking them off would be a pain. Never mind.

“Hey, hey, dear, what’s that, I wonder?!” Rokufa-ko exclaimed, pointing at a small tent covered in frilly cloth that really made it look like a fortune teller’s hut. Apparently it was a store. “Hm... Do they sell food, maybe?”

“(Lady Rokuko. That is a general store that sells accessories,)” Rokufa replied through Ceiver. On closer examination, the tent did have a board with an... accessory-esque picture on it.

“Neat! Accessories! Fashion is culture, and culture is important. Let’s take a peek,” Rokufa-ko said. I had no reason to refuse, so I agreed to go check out what they had... Except, Rokufa-ko casually linked arms. I felt two particularly soft things pressing against me as I entered the tent.

“Welcome,” came a voice. Inside the tent was a normal accessory store, with boxes wrapped in cloth atop a simple counter containing rings, necklaces,

piercings, and so on. They were split between boxes with accessories made of silver, and boxes with accessories made of gemstones.

Let's see here, a silver accessory with no stone is a single silver, while one with a gemstone is five silvers. Easy to follow.

"Let me see what you have. Hm... Is there anything you like, my wife?"

"This one seems kind of romantic. I like it!" Rokufa-ko exclaimed as she began evaluating the merchandise. The male store owner peered at my wife.

"Good sir. Are you buying a gift for your wife?"

"Right you are. Do you have any recommendations?"

"Hm, let me think... How many other wives do you have?"

Oh, right. The Holy Kingdom practices polyamory, both ways.

"None at the moment. One accessory will suffice."

"Is that so? Regardless, I suggest buying many, to prepare for the day you wed more."

"Is that standard practice...?" I asked.

"Indeed it is. Women claim to not care about differences, but they certainly do, so I advise buying multiple copies ahead of time for your own sake," the merchant said. That seemed likely to be good advice, considering the culture here.

The merchant took out a silver ear cuff with a green gemstone as his recommendation. "How about this one? Magic stones of Wind are quite nice, aren't they?"

Magic stones. Apparently the gemstones were magic stones. Which maybe meant they had magical effects?

"Does it have a magical effect?" I asked.

"Ah, forgive my rudeness! You must be here on a trip. That explains it. Truly, your clothes fit you so well I was certain you were a local!"

"How did you figure that out from what I said?"

The merchant grinned. “There are no magic stone accessories that lack effects.”

“That explains it. I should have asked *what* effect it had, then? Noted.”

“Not to mention, monogamous couples are quite rare here, you see, outside of tourists. It is normal even for commoners to have a polycule of four. We are very impressed that you foreigners manage to look after children with just two parents,” the merchant said, crossing his arms and nodding to himself.

“Do the wives ever fight amongst themselves?”

“Why do you think there are so many husbands?”

It seemed the multiple husbands were there to add resources and utility. If wives were fighting, the polycule lacked utility, and a new husband would be added to increase the available resources.

“You tourists always surprise me with your different ways... All the adults in my hometown are married, you see. Ah, and naturally there are some stronger pairs amid the groups, but having more choices for children is ideal.”

“I-I see. That’s kind of a larger scale than I imagined...”

As we talked, I bought one of each magic accessory he had, in part to bring back gifts to the dungeon. It was kind of a swagger moment for me, with me saying, “I’ll take one of everything from here to here. Will two golds suffice?” I ended up just buying the entire display box and putting it in {Storage}. I could take it apart at home and make something identical.

“Thanks for the business! By the Light, I’m glad you came. Now I can buy nice clothes for all my wives! Today, I’m the top husband!”

Incidentally, the top husband was doted upon the most out of all the husbands in a cule. Yeah, that was definitely foreign to me. The Holy Kingdom sure was something else.

With that, I left the store, carrying a good chunk of its inventory.

“Okay, where to next?” I asked aloud.

“Let’s keep this date going. It’s a date. We can eat while we walk,” Rokufa-ko replied.

“My lord, my lady, do you not need to visit the local Church of Light?”

Oh, right. That was why we had come here in the first place. Toi guided us to the church, with Rokufa-ko still linking our arms. A look at the map showed that the church district was in the dead center of Mastermind, and was big enough on its own to consume all of Goren.

“Wowee, it’s bigger than our own church,” Rokufa-ko said.

“It’s kinda overwhelming. It’s better to compare the church to all of Goren.”

The district naturally consisted of more than a single building, and was a bit like a college campus with multiple buildings, high-class living areas, stores, a library, entertainment facilities, and so on. All of those combined made the Church of Light district.

We walked a bit, and found what we were looking for. Everything was white. There were white pillars with ridges reminiscent of the Parthenon in front of a long white wall. Furthermore, there were paths connected to the gates in the walls. The other side of the gate was pure white, and I didn’t see any buildings with black cloth spread over them. Apparently even Mastermind didn’t have black curtains in the church district, to preserve the honor of the God of Light. Narikin sussed that out.

“My lord, are you currently in complete human form?” Toi asked subtly.

“Hm? Yeah.”

My whole body was in human form within my curtain-esque clothes. I wasn’t so slack that I would have armor instead of skin in the hidden bits.

“Very good. You will be investigated a second time when passing through the gate to the Church of Light district. Take care not to cancel your transformation.”

“Rokufa, you watch out, too.”

“If I weren’t transformed, my wings would be popping out. Also, don’t call me Rokufa. Call me ‘my wife.’”

Despite Toi’s warning, the female soldier at the gate gave only a brief check-over. She asked questions with a lie-detecting tool, checked our pulses on our

arms and necks, then checked inside our mouths. That was it.

The question of why we came here even had a simple and honest answer in that we were given a letter of introduction and told to visit. There was nothing suspicious about us, and no criminal history. We were set.

“That guard sure had white armor. I thought the cloth armor had to be black,” Rokufa-ko said.

“They just put white cloth over the black armor. Like a polar bear,” I said. I was pretty sure polar bears had black skin underneath their white fur.

As we spoke, Toi likewise went through the gate safely. She had taken a bit more time than us, because apparently they had stripped all her clothes and even drawn blood (with a needle that showed them the blood color immediately). It seemed our status as Class-Two citizens had been immediately useful.

“Apologies, my lord, I forgot to mention that servant checks take extra time if you do not pay a bribe. Though for subterfuge purposes it was indeed better to do it properly for once.”

“Oh, that’s the system they have?”

Either way, I was just glad to have gotten through the gate safely. Though I had doubted Toi would get caught here, when not even a slave collar worked on her.

We walked a bit down the white streets of the church district, until we finally reached the Church of Light itself. It had an especially large gate as its entrance, and there were guards filling a nearby guard box. It was a massive structure akin to a palace, which put it on an entirely different level from Goren’s church, like comparing dirt to gold.

“Our church really can’t compare to this, huh?”

“Uh-huuuh.”

The gate was open, but I wasn’t sure if we could just go in or not. As I debated that question, Toi asked for the letter of introduction so she could go to the guard post. I let her have it, and she walked over like a child on her short legs.

“Excuse me, Mr. Guard. Is this letter of introduction for here?”

“Hm? Let’s see here... Yup, it sure is. Welcome to the Church of Light.”

“Where should I go?”

“Over there, little girl. May the lord shine his light upon you.”

“Thanks, mister! Let there be light!”

The two of them lifted their hands and splayed their fingers. That was apparently how commoners greeted each other in a Church of Light-y way. Toi came back.

“What was with you acting like a kid there?” I asked.

“I would have felt stupid paying a bribe over official papers like these,” she replied.

Wait, that’s the kind of system this place uses? Either way, we could finally step inside the Church of Light.

The inside of the church had white marble flooring, walls, and pillars, with only light golden decoration, as if it was trying to broadcast just how much of a holy church it REALLY was. There were flowerbeds and running streams of water, despite being on the inside, and light rained down from the glass ceiling.

“It’s rare to see water and plants on the inside like this. The glass ceiling is something else, too,” I observed.

“Not bad at all compared to that merchant’s guild,” Rokufa-ko agreed.

“I believe they might be aiming for reactions like yours, my lady.”

There was a reception counter right by the entrance. We showed the white-clothed woman there our letter of introduction. She read the contents, then smiled at us.

“Lord Narikin, thank you for coming. Please follow me,” she said.

We were guided deeper into the church, in the opposite way the water flowed, and arrived at a white room. There was water flowing from a statue of a tiger’s head. Inside the room we were offered seats on a sofa. The woman then briskly left, saying she would call someone to meet us.

Said person came before long. He was wearing frilly, curtain-esque clothing just like us. He had a golden ring with a crest on his finger. Apparently it was the mark of a high-ranking priest: a so-called archpriest.

“Apologies for the wait. I am Santaku, an archpriest.”

“Greetings, I am Narikin Goren... but do excuse me. Do you happen to be related to Sentaku of the merchant’s guild?”

“Why yes, Sentaku is my nephew.”

That explained why they looked so similar and their names were so similar.

“In any case, the letter said that you may grant the power of the gods... May I ask the details?”

“Why yes, certainly.”

And so, we successfully put ourselves in a position to ask the archpriest about artificial dungeons.

“Splendid. So you desire to crush wild dungeons with the artificial dungeons the God of Light has blessed us with?”

“Indeed. At my wife’s recommendation.”

“Dungeons under no human’s control may eat shit, if I do say so myself, ohoho.”

“Ahaha, I see you understand well, my lady.”

We chatted, all smiles. Rokuko had used some pretty dirty language to diss dungeons, but as expected, the archpriest considered that a good thing.

“However, I see you two are not yet disciples of the Light. Naturally, given how valuable artificial dungeons are, you will need to first join our faith.”

“Hm. That does make sense. What must we do?” I asked.

“Well, if you wish to do it as soon as possible, you will need to prepare for next month’s group baptism. There are various customs and vows you must memorize to participate... From there, you will be an apprentice, and perhaps after a year or so of service you will be accepted as an apostle, our lowest-ranking clergy,” the archpriest explained, scratching his nose.

Just as I was thinking about how annoying and time-consuming that sounded, Rokufa-ko poked me in my side. *Oh... Right, he's making a ring with his finger as he scratches his nose. Alright, alright, I got it. I understand how this country works now.*

"Unfortunately, we are travelers, as you can see. May I show my faith through another way instead?" I asked, setting a gold coin onto the table.

"Hmm, your heart is certainly in the right place. I shall perform your baptism myself so you may begin as an apprentice at once."

"Ah, do forgive me. I forgot to cover my wife as well."

I set down a gold coin. Aaand... he still seemed unsatisfied. Fine, fine. I piled up ten gold coins and slid them forward.

"I hope that this sum expresses our gratitude for you, Father. Does the God of Light accept our faith?"

"Hrm, let me see here. It would indeed be rude not to accept feelings of gratitude. I do believe your faith has been conveyed. A splendid showing indeed... Your faith is clear for all to see. Oh yes, and that reminds me, I do have a lay priest position available and waiting to be filled. You are truly lucky; this must be the will of the God of Light himself."

Becoming a lay priest or whatever would apparently let us skip the whole apprentice phase and join the Church of Light right away. The power of money truly was something else; it could even distort time. Since it took ten years of faith to become a priest normally, each gold here was worth one year of time.

I gotta make sure Beddhism doesn't end up corrupted like this...

And so, I (Narikin) became a lay priest of the Church of Light. Or more precisely, I would be given the official status of a lay priest once I came back tomorrow, since there *was* a bit of paperwork he had to do. Hooray. I slid on the ring that served as temporary proof of my status as a priest. It was a bit warm. Maybe it would be better for me to wear it on a string around my neck.

"But I'm just an apprentice, hm? That's kinda sad," Rokufa-ko said.

"Being the wife of a priest makes you practically an arch-apostle, he said."

In any case, as for our sleeping quarters, they had a place for traveling priests (that is, priests who had no set church and instead traveled to spread the faith), so there was no need for us to take out an inn.

“Okaaay, let’s go on a date,” Rokufa-ko said. “We have the time, so.”

“I feel like we’re kinda forgetting why we’re here.”

“Then let’s pretend we’re gathering intel. I mean, aren’t you just super curious about what kind of place that is?” she asked, opening the map and pointing at a place called the Dungeon Ruins. It was a fairly sizable plaza.

“Dungeon Ruins?” I asked.

“(Oh, I have heard of them. It is the ruins of a destroyed dungeon, as the name implies,)” Narikin swiftly explained. “(It’s been turned into a commemorative park, one of many tourist spots in the Holy Kingdom. I believe there are round, white jars shaped like Dungeon Cores for couples to smash together. There were some at Lackey and Underling as well.)”

What the hell? For a second I was confused, but then I recalled that Church of Light weddings involved something similar when one cut the cake.

“Those are certainly an essential date spot in the Holy Kingdom,” Toi said. “They’re outside of the church district, but that should not be a problem, as the priest ring will allow us to come and go freely. My lady, we do luckily have the time, so perhaps you should visit one with my lord?”

These priest rings give that kind of power?

“Sounds good! Let’s go, dear!”

“Well, I suppose we don’t have much to do until we get the official ring tomorrow, so alright.”

“My lady, may I spend this time operating on my own to gather intelligence? It would be a pain for me to accompany you in and out of the district.”

“Uh-huh, you have my permission. See you tonight.”

“Hey, hold on, don’t just give permission on your own.”

“Thank you, my lady. I shall do my best.”

Wasn't Toi supposed to be listening to my orders specifically? Meh, the intel Toi gets is always pretty useful, so whatever. Just bring Tran (Narikin) with you. I can't just let you go off on your own completely unattended.

After seeing Toi off, Rokufa-ko linked arms.

"Done? Okay, let's go smash some pots!"

"You know they're modeled after Dungeon Cores, right?"

In any case, at Rokuko's strong suggestion, we headed to the Dungeon Ruins.

* * *

So, the Dungeon Ruins Park. It apparently used to be a dungeon. What kind of dungeon was it, you asked? It had supposedly been twelve floors in total, with an entrance on a small hill, and a mob pool consisting of undead-type monsters.

"Or so it said on a billboard by the entrance, anyway."

"This was probably before I was born," Rokufa-ko said. "I wonder what number they were."

"That's obviously not written anywhere."

All the billboards really drove it home that this was a commemorative park, or at least a tourist spot. There was a receptionist at the entrance, who charged an entrance fee (ten bronze coins for adults, three for kids), after which one could explore the inside of the dungeon. In short, a former dungeon was now a tourist spot for those who wanted to see how it felt to conquer a dungeon.

"Wait, speaking of which, wouldn't that make this a corpse to a Dungeon Core? Will you be alright?" I asked.

"It doesn't really bother me. Maybe if it had just died, or the Core fragments were the real thing, but this is already just a normal hole without any dungeon powers."

Well, she knew better than me.

The plaza around the dungeon was something of a grassy plain. We went right to the receptionist desk.

"Welcome, a party of two? Hm... Will that light equipment suffice? We do

have spare equipment of our own we can lend,” the receptionist said, showing us a price list for the equipment to borrow. It really was like an attraction.

“No need. We’re actually adventurers. Our real equipment is in {Storage}.”

“Oh, I see, my apologies. However, there are inns and light eateries within, so please don’t hesitate to drop by and favor them with your patronage.”

“Inns...?”

“Indeed. It is twelve floors, after all.”

Ah, right. This was a simple hole without the placing function, and it *was* twelve floors. It wasn’t just a set of twelve stairs to climb down, each floor was wide and its own thing. It was probably the kind of place you came to intending to stay the night.

“Excuse me! I want to do the pot-smashing; do you know where that is?”
Rokufa-ko asked.

The receptionist responded with a business smile. “Core-Smashing can be done here, but I suggest taking the time to do so in the bottommost floor’s former Core Room. Though smashing here costs one silver and five silvers on the bottom floor.”

“Hrm, the inside is four silvers more expensive?”

“Due to the transportation cost, yes.”

That made sense. Carrying fragile goods was difficult to begin with, and taking it to a former Core Room would definitely run you a premium. Their pricing seemed fair.

“Well, we’ve come all this way! We’ve gotta go all the way!”

“Hm? Er, I guess?” I replied, nodding, but not entirely sure if that was something a Dungeon Core should be saying.

“In that case, the hallway is this way. Please take your time.”

We paid the twenty coppers to get in and entered the former dungeon. It was a cave-type dungeon with Light magic tools lighting it up. However, it was reinforced with bricks, wooden pillars, the black cloth, and so on.

Destroying the Dungeon Core made the walls and floor unstable. These supplements were in place to strengthen them. There was a billboard on the wall right by the entrance.

“These Dungeon Ruins reaaally have turned into a tourist spot,” Rokuko mused.

“There’s even a map of the whole floor. Let’s see here...”

“Keima? The stairs are this way.”

Oh, whoops. I’m a bit curious about all the staff-only sections, but playing things straight seems smart for now. I can investigate in secret later if I want. Guess I could summon a spider or something with DP and send it in.

Still, I didn’t get tired no matter how much I walked. My clothes were just normal clothes, so I didn’t have Golem Assistance, but Narikin’s body likely didn’t get tired easily to begin with. He was Living Armor, after all. Rokufa-ko, on the other hand, was swiftly tapping out.

“Haah, haah... Hey, can we take a break?” she asked.

“Sure. There’s a rest spot nearby, anyway.”

One of the rooms had been turned into a cafe, where one could grab a bit of food. I peered inside and saw that on the wall was a green paper shaped like a Safe Zone symbol. It was kind of poorly done, but the thought was there.

“A tea shop right where someone with an adventurer’s stamina would start getting tired... We must be falling right in their hands. There’s a ton of people inside, too,” I observed.

“We’re going inside anyway. I’m tired,” Rokufa-ko said.

“Sure.”

We went into the cafe. The inside was more like a normal cafe than you’d expect, and between you and me, it made me start questioning whether this really was the ruins of a dungeon.

After our break, we resumed our tourism.

“The waitress said most employees stay here overnight.”

“I figure, yeah. The commute would be crazy otherwise.”

Upon leaving the cafe, we followed the path down on our way to reach the bottom floor. The dungeon wasn't a one-way path to begin with, though, so there were many branches in the road. There was no chance of getting lost thanks to the signs saying which was the short path and which was the detour.

Taking the detours would probably lead to our needing to stay in the dungeon's inn. That would end up leaving Toi alone overnight, and we had plans for tomorrow anyway.

“Guess we're taking the short path today.”

“Mhm. I'm tired.”

And so, we speedily progressed through the dungeon taking the shortest routes.

Along the way, we came across other groups of customers—each wearing adventurer clothes, and each being in a party of three to five. They all seemed to generally take the detours. Conquering mazes seemed to be a trend, and we came across people shouting, “This way next!” while boldly charging forward.

Still, there were no monsters, making it a fairly safe dungeon... Oh, and just as I thought that, we came across full-sized cardboard(?) cutouts of undead-type monsters. Naturally, we couldn't cut them down. There were stamps on them, which probably made it some kind of checkpoint. Maybe they were doing a stamp relay? Where if you got all of the stamps you got a prize?

“These kinda displays really make this feel more like a museum than anything.”

“Look, look! Don't I look cool?!” Rokufa-ko asked, picking up a paper-mâché sword and pointing it at the skeleton. It was a fancy broadsword made of light, white material.

“Oh yeah, super cool.”

I went ahead and recorded this on the monitor for fun. This would be a photo moment if I had a camera. What would a normal person do here? I doubted they'd bring a canvas and paint to sketch out a portrait.

“Okay, you go next,” she said.

“You want me to do it, too?”

“Duh.”

And so, I ended up readying the sword myself. I was just glad to see Rokufa-ko having fun.

With just a few more detours, we finally reached the twelfth floor. At our speed, it seemed reasonable to make it back to the top by the end of the day.

Incidentally, the fifth or sixth floor had been turned into a hotel section. There were a bunch of small rooms lined up like there had been in our own dungeon’s storage area, and they were used directly as inn rooms and such. Some people slept in them overnight, like the cafe staff.

“Still, once you get rid of environmental modifiers and stuff, dungeons really do just turn into a big box. I’m learning a lot,” Rokuko said.

“It makes sense when you think about it, but yeah.”

The environment effects were all just being produced by the dungeon, so without it, they’d be gone. That said, they didn’t actually run any extra cost once they were set up. Personally I liked that more; I preferred buying things flat out to paying monthly installments.

“Still, this is really trying... Do we really have to go back down the exact same path?”

“(Lady Rokuko, shall I take your place?)”

“Oh right, me leaving earlier is an option.”

Oh yeah, I forgot about Ceiver (Rokufa) entirely. Right, Rokuko’s real body is just chilling in the [Cave of Greed’s] Master Room. Though Narikin’s busy looking after Toi elsewhere. I could use {Teleport} if I wanted to, but... Oh, wait, Narikin doesn’t know it. And he probably doesn’t have the mana for it, either.

“Anyway, here it is! The Core Room!”

“Former Core Room, but yeah.”

The Core Room had a receptionist counter in front of it as well. The guy

standing behind it gave us a smile.

“Congratulations on your successful descent, adventurers. Behind this door rests the Core Room.”

“Indeed,” I said, putting on airs once again. “A conquest of this level is trivial to me... Though it seems to have been a bit hard on my wife.”

“Oh dear. That is not good at all. The basis of adventuring is maintaining strength, after all. Our first generation High Priestess once said, ‘By the time you are reassuring yourself that you still have the strength to keep going, you are already in danger.’”

The High Priestess he meant was clearly the High Priestess of Light. And I was pretty sure I had heard a similar phrase back in Japan. Maybe the first generation High Priestess was also a Hero? Might as well use my lay priest status to look it up.

“So, given that there’s a desk here... I suppose it costs extra to go through?”

“Erm... Yes. This is also the pot-breaking desk, of course.”

“Rokufa. Still got it in you to break some pots?”

“Of course, totally. We don’t need to run out of a collapsing dungeon like normal, right? We can just chill after breaking it.”

And with that, we paid the five silvers. It was the same price we had been told about up above ground.

“Now then, please wait as we prepare the pot. When it is ready, you may break it however you like. We will handle the cleaning. Some bring back pieces with them as souvenirs. Oh, but do take care not to destroy the stand. And while there is normally a ten-minute limit, we are rather free today, so you may take your time.”

So some days are busy, huh? Guess that’s a hot tourist spot for you.

Anyway, the receptionist guy carried a wooden box from a nearby room into the Core Room. Inside was no doubt a white jar shaped like a Dungeon Core. After a bit of waiting, he came back out.

“Enjoy yourselves.”

Rokufa and I walked into the hallway leading to the former Core Room at his prompting. The former Core Room itself had nothing but the stand and the white vase shaped like a Dungeon Core.

Eh... Guess I can't say much, since our Core Room is like the exact same thing. At least their stand functions as a Light Magic tool, and makes the orb shine above it. That's clever.

"Oooh, it does look kinda like one!" Rokufa-ko exclaimed.

"Not a bad recreation. So, wanna go ahead and break the pot?"

"R-Right!"

Rokufa-ko, feeling a bit shy, picked up a white mace that was resting nearby. *Yeah... This is supposed to be something that couples do together...*

"Apparently if you break it while saying a wish, it'll come true," she said.

"Oh, like 'I hope I finish work early,' or something?"

"Nuh-uh, not like that. 'May we be blessed with children' is a popular one."

Yeah... This is supposed to be something that couples do together...

"We just had Soto, didn't we...?"

"True, buuut... Long-term, you know? You know?"

"Think you'd have a better chance of your wish being granted if you asked Father."

"That's different!"

Is it?

"Er, may Haku accept our relationship?"

"I think she already does, but... Okay, fine. Heave, ho!"

We smashed the pot together.

And really, I couldn't shake the feeling that it was like... fundamentally messed up in some profound way for a Dungeon Core to make a wish while shattering a Dungeon Core (shaped pot). Still, Rokufa-ko was hugging my arm with satisfaction.

We left the Core Room.

“Ah, you were certainly fast. The exit is that way.”

“Huh?”

The receptionist indicated a set of stairs. They went directly up, unlike the stairs we had descended. Well, given how much of a straight shot the path here was, I kind of guessed there would be something like that.

“Would’ve liked it if you told us about that ahead of time...”

“Is this your first time visiting a Dungeon Ruins, honorable adventurer? Ohoho, if even a mere dungeon can produce twelve sets of stairs, there is naturally no way that we wondrous humans could not.”

Yeaah. That’s the Holy Kingdom for you.

As I nodded to myself, the receptionist explained that there were several special ventilation holes for the staircase. One would certainly need those to not suffocate in a non-dungeon stairway. Yeah.

* * *

We returned to the church district, and upon meeting up with Toi, I canceled my possession.

I woke up in my futon in the Master Room, and saw that Rokuko, who had come back early since she felt too lazy to climb the stairs, had gotten into bed with me.

“Oh, welcome back, Keima.”

“You. What’re you doing?”

And indeed, she was hugging my arm just like she had been as Rokufa.

“Your, uh, y’knows, are pressing against me. Leggo.”

“You weren’t saying that earlier.”

“It’s different when we’re Narikin and Rokufa... Er, it’s kind of embarrassing when you do it yourself, as, uh, the real you.”

Rokuko peered at my face. Then smiled.

“Well, okay. It’s not that you want me to stop because you don’t like it, so I can accept it.”

“Would you have kept doing it if I didn’t like it?”

“I would’ve stopped then, too, but I would have been in a bad mood about it,” she replied, which meant she was in a good mood now. Though it was hard for me to tell.

“Okaaaay, darliiing?”

“I do want you to stick to only using that when you’re in Rokufa, just saying.”

“But we have a kid, we’re pretty much married. Don’t whine. Rub rub,” Rokuko said, rubbing her body against mine. She felt kind of like a cat, so I rubbed under her chin. She let out a meow sound just like a cat and relaxed her body.

“Nfuu... Wh-What was that? Jeez, when did you learn to counterattack?”

“Heh. I won’t be on the losing side forever, Rokuko.”

I peeled off Rokuko and got out of bed. After a bit of stretching, I realized how stiff I really was.

“Man, it sure is weird to be tired, but not actually tired at all,” I muttered. It really was bizarre. I had been reasonably tired when possessing Narikin a second ago, but as soon as I was back in my own body I had all my stamina. Though that was pretty natural, since I had been asleep the whole time. I was still psychologically tired enough to fall asleep immediately, but anyway.

“At this rate, my muscles will probably end up atrophied...”

“What about having Elka possess your body while you’re away and having her exercise for you? Elka, could you do it?” Rokuko asked.

“Erm? Me?” Elka asked, tilting her head at the conversation suddenly being thrown her way.

“You’re already in the Master Room all the time, so who else would be better?”

“I suppose?”

Her doing workouts for me while I was asleep... That would definitely be convenient, but I felt a bit nervous about letting anyone use my Dungeon Master body, even a monster under my command. *Guess I could just invent one of those tools that electrocute muscles to work them out, or something. A Golem Electric Massager... No, maybe it would just be faster to use a monster directly, like an Electro-Jellyfish?*

* * *

The next day, I met with Santaku the archpriest at the Church of Light's waiting room once again and accepted my lay priest ring. The brass insignia ring was apparently proof of being a priest. It seemed kind of like 'lay priest' was written backwards in Japanese kanji on it, but that was probably the auto-translator, maybe? Either way, it was a bit warm, as expected.

"So I may now build an artificial dungeon in my own territory?" I asked.

"Indeed. You certainly may. Now, how much of a tithe have you prepared?"

"One hundred golds. Will that suffice?"

"Hm, well, I suppose... I know through the letter that you have a natural dungeon in your territory, is that correct? I will write an order for the dungeon seed right away; they serve as the basis for artificial dungeons."

An order form, huh? Guess that means the order form might go right to where the artificial dungeons are made. This could be our chance.

"(Rokuko, put a tiny spider on Santaku. Handle it while I'm talking to him.)"

"(Okaaaay, got it. I'll go with a spider the same color as his clothes.)"

Guess that'll make it a... spy-der. Okay, I'll see myself out. Not like Rokuko would understand the pun unless I explained.

"Now, what manner of blessing would you like?" Santaku asked.

"Oh, I may choose what kind of dungeon it is?"

"But of course. They are the crystallization of human knowledge and the God of Light's wisdom. Choice is trivial to implement."

Yeah, I suppose they could hardly call it a managed dungeon if they didn't

have any control over what it was.

“In that case, what are my choices, exactly?”

“Let me see here... If I were to speak broadly, I could say ore, animals, or plants.”

Thinking back, Dragg’s artificial dungeon produced ore in the form of Golems, while the one in Pavella’s slums produced animals like the urchins... and seaweed? Maybe it was just general ocean stuff? Anyway, Underling’s fruit fields were naturally plants.

“Could I combine animals and plants?” I asked.

“That would necessitate two artificial dungeons. They would need to be kept a bit separate for operational-safety purposes, so... It would depend on the size of your territory.”

Hmm. They’d need two, huh?

“Quite a tough choice. Would ore equate to Golems, by chance? Count Lodol’s dungeon was so.”

“Indeed, indeed. That is correct. You are quite acute.”

“In which case, plants would produce plant-type monsters?”

“They can instantly grow normal plants and eschew monsters altogether. They are managed, after all. Though monsters are simpler.”

I see, they can make adjustments like that, too.

“(The spider’s in place, Keima. I hid it in his frilly clothing,)” Rokuko said through telepathy.

“Could there be an artificial dungeon which produces cows, by chance? They would produce leather, labor, and meat. Do you not agree that cows are wondrous beings?”

“Hrm, minor adjustments of that nature remain difficult. Though it would be possible with an animal dungeon.”

“That would be my choice, then. Could I ask for an animal dungeon?”

“Certainly. I will send out the order.”

I set down the bag of a hundred golds, earning a smile from Santaku.

Alright, now's a good time to end the conversation since the spyder's in place, but I'll push just a bit more.

"When might I receive instruction on how to operate the dungeon?" I asked.

"We will send an instructor. They will also investigate an ideal location for placing the dungeon."

"The High Priestess Alca served as Count Lodol's instructor, if I recall. Hrm... My land is near the imperial capital, and so I have heard rumors that the Church of Light's High Priestess is barred from entering the empire now."

"Ah... Yes, that old tale. It referred to the High Priestess of two generations ago, in fact."

Congratulations on jumping two more generations, Alca.

"However, it is essential that we send an instructor to teach one how to handle the dungeon seed. The High Priestess would likely rather not visit the imperial capital at the moment, and so I believe we will send someone else."

"Would it be possible for me to become one such instructor?" I asked. When I gave the artificial dungeon to Haku, it'd be better if I knew how to use it myself.

"Hrm, aaah, that would be a bit... Hrm. A troubling question," Santaku said, as hesitant as I expected. Naturally it would be a bit unreasonable to teach a traveler who just dumped a ton of cash to become a lay priest how to use the ultra-secret dungeon seed technology the Holy Kingdom had developed. Or so I thought, but on closer expansion I noticed the friggin' guy making a ring with his fingers. What the hell?

"The spreading of artificial dungeons will aid in the destruction of natural dungeons. In which case, would it not be the God of Light's will to spread knowledge of them?" I asked, setting ten golds onto the table with a smile.

Santaku returned my smile. "I see, your words ring true. I will see what I may do."

"I thank you for your assistance, Father Santaku."

Jeez Louise, you really can do everything with money in the Holy Kingdom.

But anyway, time to leave the spider and stuff to Narikin and just chill in Goren.

* * *

“(Wait, Santaku died?)”

“Yes. He seems to have been murdered,” Narikin reported on the day of our regular reports.

“(We met him just yesterday, didn’t we? What about the spider we put on him?)”

“It’s safe. It is still hiding in Santaku’s room.”

According to Narikin, Santaku the archpriest had summoned someone to his room, and then that person killed him. The spider hidden in his clothes had survived, however.

“They were saying something regarding the pope’s seat just before it happened. I believe that has something to do with it,” Narikin said.

“Aaah, alright, I get it. He tried using the money I bribed him with to hire an assassin.”

Except the assassin had already received a job from one of Santaku’s rivals, and unfortunately for him, he was killed before he could finish his request. Probably something like that.

“Santaku’s corpse was discovered by a church employee, and although they attempted to use the hidden spell of resurrection, his corpse turned to ash instead. Or so we were told... In reality, we saw through the spider’s eyes that his corpse was promptly incinerated upon being recovered.”

Oh yeah, I remember Wataru mentioning that the Church of Light had the secret to resurrection or something. It was pretty suspicious, costing a ton of money to use despite only having a twenty-five percent success rate. I hadn’t heard that it turned bodies to ash when it failed, either.

Anyway, I observed the problem that Narikin couldn’t contact us immediately when something happened. We would need to figure it out.

Rokufa sighed. “Good grief, what awful timing. Surely this could have

happened when we were not here.”

“Oh dear, but it is no coincidence. It is precisely because of my lord giving him money that this happened. One hundred gold coins is certainly a large enough set of funds to cause problems in a snap. This could hardly have been avoided,” Toi said with a bemused smile.

...Right. This is less bad timing, and more us causing it indirectly.

“(Oh well. Guess we should go show our letter of introduction to the receptionist again.)”

“About that, Master. We were told our letter of introduction is no longer valid.”

“(Huh? Why?)”

“It seems this was a letter of introduction specifically to Santaku. Now that he is deceased, it can no longer be used, they said...”

Right, Santaku was the chief clerk of Underling or whatever. He probably was in a position to write that letter thanks to that job.

“(So in short, we have to go get another letter of introduction?)”

“So it seems.”

That was annoying, but whatever. I shook my head with exasperation, still possessing Tran the bird.

* * *

I decided to walk through the city of Mastermind to decide on our next move. We could bribe the merchant’s guild for another one, or we could go after another guild. We could gather intelligence in bars and gambling dens. We had many options, which I considered while traveling through Mastermind, using my lay priest ring to pass barriers. I was borrowing Narikin’s body, which meant Rokuko had insisted on possessing Rokufa’s body.

“You didn’t have to come, y’know.”

“No whining. I’m your wife, remember.”

“Right...”

Someone whistled behind us. “Boy, so this is true love, huh?” It was Toi, and I ignored her completely.

Rokufa-ko and I continued exploring through the black-curtained city of Mastermind, arms linked, when I suddenly felt eyes on me.

“Mama...?” came the deep voice of a middle-aged man. Shivers ran down my spine, and when I turned to look, I saw a familiar muscleman.

“Mama! Aaah, it’s really you, mama!”

“I think you’ve got the wrong person.”

A bearded man calling me “mama”... It was unmistakably the former Number 2 of the Last Commune that had ruled Tsia’s slums: Hugo. He had identified me before even when I wasn’t in Succuma form, but how the heck did he know it was me when I was possessing a monster? I mean, Narikin did look exactly like the normal me, but still.

“MAMAAAA!” Hugo exclaimed, barreling toward me with a broad smile on his face. He leaped over Toi when she got in between us. Her eyes widened at his unexpected acrobatics, and although I readied myself for a collision, Hugo stopped right before impact.

“Whew, that was close! I nearly broke my promise to you, mama!” he said, sounding entirely like a young child despite being an older muscleman. *Oh yeah... I used the contract magic {Treaty} to forbid unapproved touching.*

“Wait a second, isn’t this the kidnapper from before?!” Rokufa exclaimed, looking at Hugo with guarded eyes.

“Mama, who’s this? Your friend?”

“My wife,” I answered, after debating it for a moment.

“Mama’s wife... Okay. Hi, new mama! But don’t get cocky, you little brat. I’ll beat the shit out of you if you make mama sad.”

“Er, um, okay? Hi???”

Hugo and Rokufa shook hands, with multiple question marks appearing above Rokufa’s head. *What does he mean, new mama? And don’t start talking normally midway through, that’s scary as hell. Jesus.*

“Apologies, my lord,” Toi said. “He slipped me by while I was disturbed by his unusual aura... Who in the world is this?”

“A little child maid couldn’t stop my love. Right, mama?” Hugo asked with a smile, while Toi apologized.

“Errr, an old associate of mine. Don’t worry about it. And yeah, hey, Hugo. What’re you doing here?”

“Gathering info on the Divine Bedding, just like you asked, mama.”

Oh yeah, I had sent him off to gather intel. A lot had happened since then, though, and the only piece of the Divine Bedding left was the Divine Nightcap, so...

“I hear the Divine Nightcap is in this country!”

“Seriously?”

Hugo’s intelligence was about none other than the nightcap itself. Good timing, since our lead on the artificial dungeons had just been cut short. We could go look for the nightcap instead. I glanced Rokufa-ko’s way.

“Do what you want? I don’t think Haku’s job is that urgent,” Rokufa-ko said.

“True!”

Right, right. There’s no time limit on this job. No harm in taking a liiiittle detour to do something else.

Toi shrugged with a roll of her eyes.

“Also, the truth is, I know a lot more than just that!”

“Whoa, nice. Let’s hear it.”

“Okay, but... I want you to pat my head!” Hugo said, getting on one knee and poking out his head to make it easier for me to rub.

I was a bit hesitant to do so, but this information was valuable, and headpats for information like this was basically free. I went ahead and patted Hugo’s head with dead eyes. His hair was rough and shaggy, like petting a wild wolf.

“There, there. You’re a good boy.”

“Eheheh!” He closed his eyes happily. As a reminder, an older muscleman was doing all this.

“Um, dear. Shouldn’t we perhaps do this elsewhere?” Rokufa-ko suggested. It seemed we were drawing unwanted attention due to... stopping in the middle of the road and giving headpats to a weird older guy.

“...Right. Let’s go, Hugo.”

“Okie-dokie!”

And so, I reunited with Hugo, the ever-healthy disciple of Succuma.

Would be a waste to go to a cafe for something like this. Let’s just go to a back alley.

We entered an alleyway, and Toi set up a barrier that would keep away passersby. Such a thing did indeed exist.

“So, Hugo. What’d you learn?”

“No need to rush it, mama! Let’s just be happy we reunited for now. Also... You feel kind of weird? Like that body is yours, but not yours at the same time.”

“Right. I’ll spare you the details, but I’m actually borrowing this body.”

“Oh, okay! You wanted to see me so much you even borrowed a body! I’m so happy!”

That wasn’t the case at all, but I got the feeling he would pout and not tell me what I wanted to know if I denied it, so I just went with it and smiled. Though who knew how much weight a smile would have outside of Succuma form.

“Oh, mama, you joined the Church of Light?”

“Hm? Oh, this. Nah, I’m just infiltrating it,” I said, holding out my lay priest ring.

“Oh, okay, that’s good then. It’s the Church of Light that’s using the Divine Nightcap.”

What the? Though I guess it’s obvious that if the bedding’s here, it’d be the Church of Light that owns it.

“I know the Divine Bedding is super, and apparently they’re using that power

to make something amazing. Though I dunno what,” Hugo said.

Something amazing... Is it jumping to conclusions to just assume that something amazing is artificial dungeons? I mean, I don't know what else it would be.

“So, the fact you're here means you've tracked the Divine Bedding to this city?”

“That's right, mama! I wish I coulda found it on my own, I was planning to come back to Tsia and surprise you.”

I see, now I really need to investigate this Divine Nightcap. One could truly call this a work of fate.

“Wait, does that mean you have a way to get the bedding?”

“Uh-huh, it's in the district. Will you help, mama? I'll be the one stealing it!”

Stealing, huh? Hmm, there's the rule about absolute ownership for the Divine Bedding, but... Given that the Church of Light is using it for something important, it'd probably be impossible to get it normally. I could probably just steal it and use GP to ask Father to change the setting.

“I have other work to do, so no plans that're too complicated or might get wanted posters of me put up, alright?”

“Yay! I'll do my best!” Hugo smiled a sparkling smile and gave me a thumbs up.

“So, whaddaya need?”

“I wanna kiss on my forehead!”

I'd really rather not?!

“Surely that would be worth getting the Divine Nightcap,” Rokufa-ko said, a hand over her mouth to cover her grin.

Hey. Do you just want to see me kissing a dude's forehead?!

“I've kissed Haku before, so what's the problem? Go ahead. Go, go, go.”

“That's obviously way different. Haku's hot as hell *and* your sister.”

“This guy calls you his mama, which makes him your son, no? Plus he’s strong, so most girls would probably think he’s hot, too, in that way. It’s basically the same.”

What... the... No way, girls would find this toddler role-playing weirdo hot?!

“Toi, back me up here!”

“Erm. Putting aside his unusual behavior, I believe my lady is not incorrect. Although I was disturbed, he did manage to pass my guard, which would make him fairly strong...”

Even Toi recognizes his strength? On second thought, Haku has weird fetishes, too... N-No way! They’re literally all the same! NOOOOO!

“Seems like you fucks understand. Glad that mama has smart companions. Now... Mama! Kissie on my forehead!”

“Wait, wait, wait!” I thrust out my hands, stopping Hugo from pushing out his forehead any farther. “What I’ll help with is what you need me to do to get the Divine Nightcap. A kiss on the forehead would be a reward for finishing the job, not starting it.”

“Sometimes you need to pay in advance, mama!”

“Plus! This body isn’t mine, so, uh, how about I pay you with something else?! Right, like a new bandana, or something!”

“Hm. I definitely would rather the kiss be from your real self. Okay!”

Whew, negotiations successful. Whew. Whew.

“Errr, for now, just tell me what you need to get into the church district. I am technically a lay priest, so with enough money you should be able to get in without any checks.”

“Thanks, mama. But that’s okay. There’s an underground passageway that connects the outside to the church. I even have wanted posters here, so I couldn’t pass through the gates.”

I knew Hugo had been the number two of a crime syndicate in Tsia’s slums, but he hadn’t done anything that would earn him a criminal record here in the Holy Kingdom, I was pretty sure. He must have done something here, too.

“The heck did you do?”

“Nothing bad! I just assassinated a bad person for work. I worked in the church last night, too!”

“Eh, guess I can’t blame you, then...”

The Beddhist Church had nothing bad to say about those who killed for work. What else would we do, belittle the fine soldiers, guards, and Dungeon Masters of the world? Far be it from me to... *Wait, last night?*

“Did you kill the archpriest Santaku by chance?” I asked.

“Um, why do you... Oh no, sorry! Was he a friend of yours, mama?!”

Ngh, this guy cut me off from the artificial dungeons... Though even if he weren’t here, some other assassin probably would have done the job!

Wait, no, I need to think about this another way. If he was the assassin, he knows something about who made it happen. Normally he would be tight-lipped, but well, this is Hugo.

“If you want my forgiveness, tell me who ordered Santaku’s death and why.”

“Okay! It was the head archpriest of the pope faction, Ragil! He didn’t say anything about why, but I think it’s ’cause Santaku was part of the reform faction and was making moves.”

“Alright. Well, no helping that then. It was your job.”

Ragil. I’ll remember that name. Also, today I learned there’s different factions in the church. Pope faction, reform faction, okay.

And so, we acquired Hugo’s assistance. For better, or probably worse... *Guh, why do we have a pervert in our party...*

“By the way, I heard the Divine Nightcap is stored in a facility hidden in the underground passageway. We can go sneak in tonight!”

Man, you really are useful... albeit perverted.

Partially out of spite I summoned a snake pet with DP and gave that as his reward. Though he ended up not hating it that much. He said, “It’s so cute I want to eat it up, just like you, mama.”

Ngh. Don't eat it. Seriously. Drop it.

* * *

I returned to Goren and rested, feeling exhausted in more ways than one.

I chilled in the Master Room, waiting for nighttime, and at some point Soto came to join me. By which I mean she popped out of my {Storage}. It was kinda crazy that it even connected to the Master Room.

Rokuko, who had likewise been chilling, brought her up to date with the Holy Kingdom stuff.

“So, yeah, a guy who calls Keima ‘mama’ joined our group.”

“What the?! He gets to call papa ‘mama’ even though I don’t?!”

Hugo and the other Last Commune guys started calling me mama, saint, and so on before you were even born, Soto.

“That guy is a human, right? Why is he calling papa ‘mama’? I don’t get it.”

“When Keima became his mama, he was in a special form.”

“A special form...!”

Soto and Rokuko looked at me in unison.

“What’s his special form, mama?!”

“Oh, well. You know the ring Succubus that Keima’s using as a guard? When he lets it possess him, he becomes Succubus Keima... In short, Magical Pretty Girl Succuma!”

“Magical Pretty Girl Succuma!!!”

They glanced at me again. *Not gonna happen.*

“Is the, um, Succubus possession different from the possession you two are doing, mama?”

“Very clever, Soto! It’s certainly different from both {Possession} and [Possession]. Keima retains consciousness during it, so maybe ring Succubi are just special?”

“That’s very interesting! I’m curious to learn more!”

“Maybe you could, if you saw the real thing.”

They glanced my way. *Glance all you want, it's not happening.*

“Well, I guess it's more like a fusion than anything? Maybe a fusion possession?” Rokuko ventured.

“Fusion possession! Okay, so it's like Synchro!”

“(Fusion possession: Synchro! Okay, I'll start using that now!)”

“Oh, you're motivated, Kosaki. Maybe we should celebrate this naming by having him show us the Synchro?”

“Not happening!” Kosaki getting motivated was not about to change my decision-making process.

“Aww, you won't do it? Even after getting us so excited?”

“Papa, you suuuck. No faiir.”

“There's no fair or not fair about this. You lot got excited all on your own.”

Good grief. I really need to ask Ittetsu about some tricks to being a dad.

...Wait. Have I even told Ittetsu I have a daughter now?

“Oh crap. I forgot to tell our neighbors about Soto.”

“Don't worry, I'm on top of it. I already introduced her to Core 219 and Redra,” Rokuko said.

“What the. When?”

Oh, duh. When I was asleep, obviously.

“Igني taught me the trick to using your dungeon functions to move through the dungeon!”

Our daughters are even bonding?!

“Sorry. Guess I kinda dumped it all on you.”

“It's whatever. Niku and Ichika were there, too, and Soto isn't much of a handful anyway. It's so different from what the couples in the town are like Waife said, it's kind of crazy.”

Yeah, since they were talking about how their baby was keeping them up all night crying. Soto started out as a loli. No need for diapers.

“Which reminds me, for some reason there’s more and more babies in town,” I said. It was increasingly becoming a regular occurrence for couples to get married in the church. They weren’t all as over-the-top as Hubb and Waife’s had been, since we had paid for that one, but performing wedding vows in general was free. And naturally, marriage led to births.

“Uh-huh. I think this is called a baby boom?” Rokuko ventured.

“We might want to learn a bit from the Holy Kingdom and build some kind of public daycare or something.”

Or a day nursery, even. Maybe the church could do that...? I feel like the nuns would not necessarily be great influences, but I could put up jobs for it in the adventurer’s guild. Married adventurers could do it as a part-time job. I would fund it myself as a town facility.

“Oh, subsidizing it ourselves? That’s a good idea. The wives in the town will love it,” Rokuko said.

“Papa, let’s add more picture books to the church library! Books are really important! They enrich your life!”

Well, if they’re both in approval, I’ll just toss this idea to Wozma.

“You know, if you’re going to be working for other kids, how about you look after our own kid a bit more?” Rokuko asked. Indeed, I certainly had barely been engaging in child-rearing. That was probably bad.

“Alright, ask me to do anything. I’ll do it if I can.”

“Okay, then turn into Succuma,” Soto said.

“Yeah, anything but that.”

Succuma absolutely had nothing to do with raising children. Rokuko puffed out her cheeks and started jabbing her finger into my side. It actually kind of hurt.

“Doing what your daughter asks even when they’re being selfish is part of being a parent, Keima! Redra said so!”

“And Igni said that you’re only a real daughter if you act selfish like this sometimes!” Soto exclaimed, poking me on the other side from where Rokuko was. Owies.

“There are some lines that can’t be crossed. Succuma is one such line,” I said. Succubus-charming my wife was one thing, but my daughter? There was a special hell for that, surely.

“Don’t worry, we borrowed the [Chains of Admonition] from Redra!”

Rokuko took out a set of golden, sparkling chains. That was the legendary treasure that had completely blocked Succuma’s charms back during the Igni incident.

They actually went and borrowed it? Oh, and it’s not just for one person? Two or three people can use it if you can reach around with the chain? Neat.

“Why do you even want to see Succuma that much, Rokuko? I already showed it to you.”

“I wanna see it again! Also, I want Soto to see how cute Succuma is!”

“Mama’s made me curious! Succuma must be something else!”

“Alright, I’m starting to think Succuma might have an addictive quality on the level of illegal drugs...”

On second thought, the former members of the Last Commune should have made that clear with their obsession. One just had to look at how addicted even Hugo was, to the point that he was stuck on me even when not transformed and in an entirely different body from my own.

Yeah, I really need to seal Succuma away forever... Actually, wait.

“Could I take the form without you possessing me, Kosaki, if I used {Ultra Transformation}?”

“(Erm, I’m not sure. I couldn’t say.)”

“Why not give it a try? I’ll watch over you! And if you Synchro’d in that form, maybe you would turn into Super Succuma?” Rokuko said, wrapping the Chains of Admonition around her and Soto. *Jesus, that sounds terrifying. I’m never doing it. Nor am I doing normal Succuma.*

* * *

Night came. It was time to infiltrate the facility we believed had the Divine Nightcap. I possessed Tran, while Narikin would be observing Hugo from up close.

“(Mama, can you hear meee?)” Hugo asked, speaking through the snake I had given him as a familiar. I could see him through the monitor, so I had the snake nod.

“(Okay, let’s start the infiltration. I’ll steal it if I can, but for today the main plan is just to gather intel.)”

Oh, huh. He’s pretty methodical. As one would expect from a former number two.

I had a lock on Hugo’s position and movements through the map. He was outside the church district, in the nighttime city with these black curtains over everything. There was a small building in one corner of the city.

Hugo took out a key that looked as if it had been formed by pushing a bunch of wires into a keyhole.

“(Oh, this is a copy of the key for this building! I made it when I was given a key for my job the other day.)”

He can even make copies of keys, huh? Impressive.

He opened the door, and inside was nothing but a stairway built into the floor heading down. There were weapons on the walls, but I didn’t see any tables or seats. The stairway was just... there, in the middle. As if to say the building itself existed only to hide the stairway.

“(This leads to the underground cellar. We’ll reach the church if we go straight ahead, but there’s a branch midway through.)”

The stairs led to an underground hallway with white walls. Incidentally, the fact we could see despite there being no light source was a very distinctive trademark of dungeons.

“Hrm. Could this be a dungeon, Master?” Narikin asked.

“(Yeah, this might just be an artificial dungeon.)”

We had made tunnels in our dungeon, too, and they were pretty convenient. You didn't need any support structures, and they were always bright. There was no fear of collapse, and even if you tried to break it, you could repair it immediately. They were just about perfect for underground passageways.

Hugo walked for a while, and eventually there was a steel grate blocking a passageway to the left. Apparently that was where the facility was. He naturally didn't have a copied key for this one... Or so I thought, but Hugo pulled out a key ring. There were five keys on it that all looked like a bunch of wires.

“(I thought this would happen, so when I was in the church, I snuck into an office and copied all the keys. Hopefully one works!)” he said, trying out each key one by one. The third one got the gate open.

This guy really is skilled. If only he weren't a pervert... Well, I guess it was me who made him one... and he wouldn't be working for us otherwise, but still.

“(Oh, good! That makes this easier,)” Hugo said. Apparently he had been planning to pick the lock otherwise. “(Oh, you want to know how I made these keys, mama? Eheheh, I don't mind teaching you. I can use my skills to move needles. Keys work as long as you have the shape right.)”

Apparently he had a {Metal Manipulation} skill. He told me how to make the copy keys even though I hadn't asked. He was a reliable guy, but that kinda sent shivers down my spine.

“This man is quite the valuable tool. How did you bend him to your will, Lord Keima?” Toi asked.

“(I used one of my forbidden techniques. Please don't ask for details.)”

Further down the side passageway was a small room without a door that was the spitting image of a dungeon room. We peered inside, and found a black Dungeon Core. Several cables were attached to it, connecting it to the ceiling, walls, and stone slates in front of it. I recognized that.

“Master.”

“(Yep, that settles it. This is an artificial dungeon.)”

But we could put that aside for now. We were here for the Divine Nightcap,

and so we kept moving.

“(Now the search really begins!)” Hugo exclaimed, slapping his cheek to pump himself up. There were seven small rooms lined up on the side of the hall, and Hugo advanced stealthily toward them while keeping his footsteps silent.

“(Mama, can you help? I want you to shake the snake’s head to tell me if people are there.)”

I nodded, then moved the snake forward to take a peek.

...Oh? There was a big glass tube, connecting the floor to the ceiling. It was big enough for a person to fit in, and cables were connected to it as well. Nothing was inside of it. There were stone slates nearby, like those stuck to the artificial Dungeon Core.

“(Was anyone there?)” Hugo asked as we returned. I shook the snake’s head to say no.

We advanced past the door and headed to the next room. I looked in again, but once again it was empty save for the glass tube. I was under the impression this was a facility for making something, so maybe they were cultivation tubes?

The next room likewise was empty with a glass tube. No people were in sight.

Finally, we reached the middle room. This one was different.

It was twice as large as the other rooms, and in the middle was a golden half sphere. The half sphere had several pipes stretching out from it, running along the ceiling and floor to connect to the wall. Maybe it was connected to the glass tubes. There were windows attached, from which light was leaking.

And now, despite it being the middle of the night, there were four men with lab coats inside, and two guards with cloth armor.

That light has some divinity to it. Guess this is it?

Hugo pulled me back. I shook my head, to indicate people were inside. Hugo disappeared his aura and carefully held out a small mirror to look inside.

“(...That’s it. The half sphere is probably a magic tool for sucking out energy from the Divine Bedding,)” Hugo said, his expression tense. A magic tool for sucking out energy from divine items... Never heard of one of those before.

“(I think I could handle six people, maybe? I wanna hide for now and see if there’s days with less guards, but what do you think, mama?)”

I shook the snake’s head. We had come all this way; it would be better to be thorough and plan everything out. And really, what the heck was this facility even for? One would think the tubes were used for making modified humans or monsters, but...

Don’t tell me this is where they make the artificial dungeons? I guess that would make sense if a Core clone was inside that one glass tube we saw.

In which case, I could accomplish both my goals and Haku’s by stealing the Divine Nightcap, which they were using as a power source. That was two birds with one stone, and doing a bit of prep work to make sure it went smoothly made complete sense.

“(Want me to look at the other rooms?)” Hugo asked, to which I made the snake nod. He swiftly moved farther down the hall, without a sound.

We reached the fifth door from the entrance. Its glass tube had a purple liquid, and a fist-sized black ball floating within it. The ball was pulsating visibly. It was like a fetus, or rather, an egg.

“Master. This orb feels wrong to me somehow. Could it be...?”

“(Yeah. This is an artificial dungeon, or wait, maybe a Dungeon Eater? It also looks like the black bug that stuck itself to Core 564’s left arm.)”

There was nobody inside, so we went into the room with Hugo.

“Mama. There’s a note on the wall,” Hugo said, pointing to a note with “Type: Seed (Animal)” written on it.

That sounded familiar... Actually, it was probably the artificial dungeon—er, dungeon seed I had ordered. And given the formatting of the note, it seemed that they made things other than just dungeon seeds.

Right, just like Japanese green tea and black tea use the same tea leaves, they can probably change how these things work by altering the creation process. They can make dungeon seeds, Dungeon Eaters, and parasites all from the same source. This is something I want to investigate more.

Rokufa grimaced at the half-grown dungeon seed shown on the monitor.
“Hrm, so this is a half-made artificial dungeon? It’s rather gross.”

“You believe so? I, in fact, find it rather cute,” Toi said. Interesting, but I was on Rokufa’s side here. I would probably never understand Toi.

“What should we do, Master?” Narikin asked.

“(Leave it for now. We’ll grab the nightcap when the finished product is there, too.)”

Haku had asked for us to get an artificial dungeon if possible. In which case, taking it slow here and waiting for the dungeon seed to finish growing would be ideal.

I conveyed to Hugo we were pulling out by moving the snake to the exit.

“(Okay. We’re retreating for today.)”

Hugo understood my intention, left the room, and immediately jumped up. For a second I had no idea what had happened, since my vision had flipped upside down so abruptly, but apparently he had stuck himself to the ceiling. I had no idea how he could move his massive body so deftly.

A look showed that the two guards in cloth had come to investigate the room. Their heads were spinning as if searching for something. They were clearly looking for intruders. I looked to Hugo, not knowing what the plan was, and he took out a live mouse from his chest pocket. He then tossed it behind the guards, along with some bread crumbs.

I had no idea why he had a mouse, but it chirped after eating some of the crumbs, causing the guards to turn around.

“(Oh, what. It was just a mouse,)” a guard said, stabbing the mouse with his sword. He tossed the corpse into the hall. “(Good grief. These intruder detects make our job easier, but they feel way too sensitive.)”

“(Agreed. We don’t get any time to rest with it.)”

After watching the guards leave the room, Hugo silently dropped from the ceiling... Jeez, he was way too skilled. Guess his assassin work wasn’t just for show.

“(Seems like they have a way to detect intruders entering the room... I got that mouse to feed Mr. Snake, but now I’ll have to catch a new one,)” Hugo said, and this time for sure we escaped the facility.

Oh, that’s why he had the mouse.

However, the facility’s defenses only increased from there. The lock was changed, and they added more guards.

“(Sorry, mama, this is all because I got caught. I should’ve stolen the nightcap right then. Right now I could be giving the nightcap to you...)”

“Nah, don’t sweat it. Nobody could have seen this coming. More importantly, we got a lot of valuable information.”

They had likely figured out that the mouse hadn’t been the only intruder. If they were using dungeon functions, it would be hard for Hugo to deal with them.

“We can just ignore them for now. We still need to wait for the seed to finish growing.”

“(Okay. I’ll go make preparations. This time, I’ll do so good you have to give me a kiss!)”

And so, Hugo kept up his investigation, looking for openings while making his preparations to steal the nightcap.

* * *

And so, I once again possessed Narikin and visited the Church of Light. My idea was that if the growth of the artificial dungeon was progressing, I could get it even without a letter of introduction. Thus I thought I would have the receptionist bring me someone I could actually talk to. Maybe Santaku had a replacement by now, but I wasn’t picky. The pope faction would be fine, too.

“My sympathies. To think your close friend Father Santaku would so suddenly be sent to conquer the dungeon of no return. May Father Santaku be blessed,” the receptionist said.

“Y-Yeah... May Father Santaku be blessed,” I said. That euphemism was

probably their way of expressing someone had died. Very fitting.

“In any case, Medpriest Narikin. We have been waiting for you.”

“Wait... Sorry, but wasn’t I a lay priest?” I asked, holding up my lay priest ring.

The nun receptionist smiled softly. “I am told you were promoted for your good deeds just the other day.”

Good deeds? The only thing I remembered doing here at all was give a bribe. What was going on?

“You came today to receive special training, no?”

“Ah! Oh, yes. That’s right. Where might they be held?”

The phrase “special training” did remind me of one thing: that I had paid to be trained to be an overseer for an artificial dungeon. Indeed, no doubt Santaku had made the arrangements before he died. He even promoted me to medpriest! Wow, the power of money was something else. *Thanks, Santaku. Hopefully the money I gave you is useful in heaven, too.*

“Please wait in the room at the end of the hall. We will be summoning an instructor,” the nun said, and so I waited in the room with Rokufa-ko and Toi. She hadn’t said anything about my companions, so it was probably okay for them to be with me?

After some time waiting, our instructor arrived. It was a green-haired woman clad in priest clothing, who...

“Apologies for the wait. It is nice to meet you, Narik— Oh my... Keima?”

It was Alca the High Priestess herself. The sweet, flowery scent of a lily tickled my nose.

Crap... I can’t believe I met someone here who knows me. I mean, it just happened with Hugo, but to think that the High Priestess herself would be assigned to teach me.

“Greetings, High Priestess. I am Narikin. It is an honor to be taught by the High Priestess herself.”

“Oh my? Oh my my my. I understand everything. It is nice to meet you,

Narikin. I am Alca Rue Bipolar Red, but you may address me as Alca.”

Alca smiled. Her cheeks were flushed ever so slightly.

“To think you even brought Rokuko with you. Ahaha, this is truly a blessed reunion.”

“It is an honor to meet you, High Priestess. I am Rokufa. His wife.”

“Yes, greetings, Rokufa. I hope we may continue to be good friends,” Alca said, giving a pleased, knowing smile. She probably casually changed her name there to go along with the cover story of her having passed the torch to a new High Priestess.

She probably thinks we're peas in a pod for doing the same thing. She definitely does.

“Changing the color of your hair is certainly an orthodox strategy. However, to think that you would become a priest with ten years of experience, and one of the reform faction as well. That would explain why you are so familiar with the Church of Light, Keima.”

“Keima is my older brother. And unfortunately, he does not worship the God of Light.”

“I see, I see,” Alca said, nodding while smiling.

Dammit, I shouldn't have gone with the same face, but it's too late for that. I'm just gonna stick to claiming I'm my own little brother. And also, is she saying I have ten years of experience as a priest because that's what the paperwork says? I won't correct her, since that's probably convenient for me.

“The recently deceased Santaku's paperwork was so unbelievably convenient I came to see what falsehoods lay behind it, but... I see my suspicions were not mistaken,” Alca said, nodding to herself as she concluded that coming had been the right call.

“Erm, my apologies, but may I ask what Santaku's report said?”

“Certainly. ‘A traveling priest beneath me has returned home from dungeon duty and succeeded in offering one of the empire's dungeons to the God of Light. For his accomplishments I would like for him to be awarded with the

status of special priest, on par with a medpriest.’”

Right, this is the Church of Light. Offering up a dungeon (that is, swapping a dungeon with an artificial dungeon) would be a pretty huge accomplishment here.

“It is unfortunate that Father Santaku passed away so suddenly after his disciple made such great accomplishments. May he find more honor across the great bridge.”

“I certainly agree. I can only say, may Father Santaku be blessed.”

That must be another Church of Light euphemism. I went ahead and agreed, since it sounded like she was blessing him using the same language I had just learned from the receptionist.

“Ahaha, you certainly are strong, Narikin.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, nothing. Oh yes, your medpriest ring. Here you are.”

I took the ring with ‘medpriest’ written backwards on it from Alca. Incidentally, Rokuko had confirmed that the text was written in Japanese, which she could do thanks to having the {Japanese} skill. It was probably obvious that a church worshiping the God of Light would have deep connections to Heroes. One might as well call Heroes the muscle of the God of Light, after all.

Also, I had to immediately return the lay priest ring I had just gotten the other day.

“Oh my, this seems quite new. That is rare for a traveling priest... you must have been taking very good care of it, hm?”

“Indeed. I performed {Purification} upon it every day from the day after Father Santaku first gave it to me to now,” I said, evasively. That was only one time in practice, since I had dropped it this morning and cast {Purification} to clean it, but it wasn’t a lie. Every day was still every day.

“How wonderful. Now then, I will distribute this ahead of time, in respect of your dedication. It is the ring of a specialty priest. This is normally something delivered after training, but here you are,” Alca said, giving me a ring with

‘specialty priest’ written on it backwards.

“Is that wise?” I asked.

“Certainly. It is no problem at all. In the first place, Keima... Excuse me, Narikin. In the first place, I trust and value you highly. However, do take care to not display this carelessly in public,” Alca said, staring fixedly at me.

Oh yeah, she trusts me as Keima since I had saved her life before (despite the fact she would just revive anyway). But I’m a different person! Don’t forget that, it’s important.

“Um, Alca... I mean, excuse me, High Priestess Alca. Could you not gaze upon my husband so?”

“Oh my, Rokufa. But what harm is there in doing so? May the glorious be admired, I say.”

“No, no. I don’t want him getting more wives.”

“My my. That is truly an alien opinion to have in this holy land of the light.”

“I mean, I’m not from this country, so yeah,” Rokufa-ko said, puffing out her chest. Apparently she wanted to monopolize me so much she would drop the stealth act. I kind of didn’t see why she’d get jealous when this was Narikin’s body, but it did make me a bit happy.

“Speaking of which, where is Ichika? I see you brought your beastkin slave instead, but... Oh? Oh my my. I see no ears or tail... Did you perhaps cut them off?” Alca asked, looking at Toi. Apparently she couldn’t tell Niku and Toi apart. No surprise there, since they looked identical.

“A beastkin slave, you say? You must be thinking of someone else. Isn’t that right, Toi?”

“If you will permit me to speak, High Priestess. No ears or tails have been cut off my body. There would be no need to do so. You are certainly thinking of someone who looks similar to me. I will not deny looking similar to my lord’s dog, but naturally many would be displeased by one with furry ears and a tail serving a priest, no?”

That was some deceptive wording if I had ever heard it. She certainly didn’t

need to cut off her tail, since she was hiding it with magic, and she was indeed a different person, and indeed Niku was a dog, and indeed people would be displeased by a priest having a beastkin maid, but if you combined those it makes it sound like I was the kind of guy to have a loli cosplay as a dog girl for purposes best left unsaid.

Toi smiled.

You did that on purpose, you little fuck.

“For the sake of my lord’s honor, there is much I must keep secret,” Toi said, putting a finger over her lips in a cute fashion.

I mean, it’s good that you’re not telling the High Priestess everything about us, but phrasing?! Come on!

“Oh my! My my, I see. I was truly deceived. Your acting is something to behold. Ohoho... You have quite stimulating taste, Narikin.”

“Ahaha...”

All I could do was smile.

* * *

Since this was too top secret for anyone but members of the clergy to hear, supposedly, Alca had Rokufa-ko moved to a separate room while giving me my special priest training.

“No taking notes, incidentally. We do not know whose eyes might fall upon them,” she had said, but I would need to share the lesson with Narikin later. I elected to use the email function to stealthily write notes. That would also allow me to send them directly to Haku.

“Now then, allow me to begin. However, as you already know much about artificial dungeons, Narikin, a brief description should suffice.”

“I would rather ensure my fundamentals are sound,” I said.

“Certainly. I will explain while we view the real thing,” Alca said, retrieving an ornate glass bottle from her pocket. Inside was a small, black glass shard.

“This is a dungeon seed, an inactive seed for an artificial dungeon. One can

activate it through a chant, which goes as follows... O ye of darkness, awaken—{B-Awake},” Alca chanted, and the shard squished into a spherical shape.

“O ye of darkness, halt and enter a slumber—{B-Sleep},” she continued. The sphere returned to being a shard.

“It’s the same chant used to harden and soften the masterful black cloth sold here in Mastermind, so perhaps you have heard it already, though the black cloth does not change so dramatically.”

Neat. That’s kind of similar to a Slime. Though... When it comes to black Slimes, there’s one thing that comes to mind first: Leona’s pet, Rin. Which reminds me... Leona had that worm she stuck on Core 564’s arm, too.

“Now, as for where to place this, ideally it would be close to a natural dungeon. However, on top of that, it is advised to place it in a spiritually clean location where mana—that is, leylines—flows smoothly.”

In short, place it outside of dungeon territory. That’s why I didn’t have any idea of when or where Dragg’s was placed despite it being so close to our dungeons. Makes sense.

“Narikin, do you have a skill that allows you to see mana?”

“Er, yeah. I do.”

Narikin’s Living Body armor didn’t have eyes to begin with, and so manasight was one of his default attributes. I had confirmed at the dungeon ruins the other day that it worked.

“Now then, has any part of my explanation been unclear so far?”

“No, I believe we are on the same page.”

“Then let us perform a simple test.”

I repeated the chants, reading off the text of my email, and Alca nodded in satisfaction.

“Excellent. You are truly a wonderful, brilliant student. And with that, let us move onto observing a fully functioning artificial dungeon,” Alca said, leaving the room. I followed after, and... Oh, we came to a *locked* door. She opened it, and we took stairs downwards until we reached a white passageway. Wowee,

it's the church's side of the passageway we snuck into yesterday. This was no doubt the closest artificial dungeon nearby, but... Was it really wise for her to just bring me here?

"In truth, we are producing artificial dungeons farther down this way," she said. Wowee, she was sure spilling a lot of beans.

"Should I be allowed in here?"

"It's no problem at all, as you are a specialty priest. Furthermore, you do have my faith, Narikin."

Her trust in me was ridiculously unfounded. I was literally a spy sent here to destroy it.

She took me to the administration room, which held the black Dungeon Core.

"This is the administration room. These stone slates display information on the dungeon."

"Oho. Just from a glance, I feel that I understand how they function."

"Splendid. Just as artificial dungeons craft emergency escape passageways, they also maintain facilities far in the back. Oh yes, would you like to see one in production?" she asked. I had just snuck in the other day, but sure, why not.

"Absolutely. I would love to see a dungeon seed being made."

"Ahaha. Follow me, then."

Alca guided me to the fifth room down the hall, where a dungeon seed was being made. A man in a white lab coat stood up and bowed to us.

"This is Narikin, a newly arisen specialty priest. Do not forget his face."

"Er... Greetings," I said, and the man deepened his bow.

"Now, would you care to update us on its progress?"

"Yes, High Priestess. It is presently ten percent finished."

The black ball floating within the glass tube's purple liquid had shrunk to half the size it had been yesterday, which made me realize that the dungeon seed was even smaller than that.

“This ball will become a dungeon seed?” I asked.

“Indeed,” the man in the coat replied. “It will shrink even further, until ultimately it is small enough to fit in a jar.”

“So it shrinks as it develops, then. Strange.”

“Father, we are using this liquid to control and compress it.”

“I see... High Priestess. Is anything else made here?”

“Oh my my. How insightful, Narikin. You are correct; by changing the management liquid, we can also make lifeforms built for defeating dungeons: Dungeon Eaters,” Alca replied in response to my leading question. Dungeon Eaters. Those were the black bugs that had attacked the [Cave of Greed] before. They had messed Rokuko up by eating her dungeon.

But wait... Their official name is Dungeon Eaters? I had just made up a name on the spot back then, but I guess there really isn't anything else to call them.

“Are those organic weapons researched and developed in this facility as well?” I asked.

“Naturally, that much is not for even a specialty priest to know.”

Fair. That said... This room didn't have any tools for experimenting, and had at most the bare minimum of machinery and chemicals, so any laboratories would be elsewhere.

Haku had asked me to destroy the facilities producing artificial dungeons, so ideally my targets would be this place and their laboratory. Might as well look more into it.

From there, she taught me how to use the artificial dungeon's administration room to fiddle with the numbers for options. We didn't go so far as to actually summon monsters, but she taught me several hidden options for maintenance purposes. It also had a function for detecting invaders and people entering specified rooms without permission.

I leaked all of that to Haku, too. Man, I sure was doing some serious spy work.

And then, once we were done with the basics and preparing to leave...

“Now, now, High Priestess Alca. What might you be doing here? Who is this man?” came an elderly man’s voice. I turned and saw a broad-shouldered elderly man wearing ornately decorated black priest clothing.

“Your holiness. This is Father Narikin, a medpriest. He achieved great things as a traveling priest, and has just been assigned to be a specialty priest. He is undergoing training at the moment,” Alca said.

I swiftly lowered my head upon hearing he was the pope. *Isn’t he the head of the Church of Light? Why’s he here? Guh, I can feel the immense pressure of an important political figure. He has the same kind of presence that Haku and the Great Demon King do.*

“There, there. Raise your head,” he said, and when I did so, the pope gave me a calculated, thorough look-over. He then smiled and let up on the pressure.

“Hrm, you’re a young man with potential. Continue dedicating yourself to the faith.”

“Yes, your holiness. I am moved by your praise,” I replied as he patted my shoulder.

“So, your holiness, why *are* you here?” Alca asked again.

“Ahaha, the truth is, I heard you were here with a man, Alca. Consider me nosy all you like, but I came to see for myself. Though I knew that if anything happened, you could manage on your own. You’re a strong girl.”

“Oh my my. Goodness, your holiness, whatever are you saying?” Alca asked, covering her mouth and giving a refined giggle.

“I shall be off, then. Try to keep your romantic meetings to a minimum, even if they are out of sight. Blessed be the light.”

“My goodness, your holiness. Blessed be the light.”

“Blessed be the light,” I said, copying Alca after a pause, not really knowing if I should be saying anything or not.

Once the pope had left, Alca shook her head with a sigh.

“You are certainly on good terms with his holiness the pope. I suppose I should expect nothing less from the High Priestess?”

“Oh, stop it, Narikin. I can be both a member of the reform faction and a granddaughter who adores her grandfather.”

Why is the reform faction being brought up here? And what, Alca was the pope’s granddaughter?

“I had no intention of offending, but my apologies if I did. I am not the most learned in social matters. This is the first I am hearing of you being the pope’s granddaughter, High Priestess.”

“Oh yes, you were traveling through foreign countries until just the other day. And although you were Father Santaku of the reform faction’s disciple, you were not informed in matters of politics and social relations. You truly are a proper priest, Narikin,” Alca said with a smile. “He is not my grandfather by blood. The pope has no wife or children of blood—I am just one of his adopted daughters.”

According to her, when Alca had become a High Priestess candidate at a young age, she had left her original family to become a member of the pope’s family. There had been other candidates, but they all failed, and it was Alca who succeeded the previous High Priestess.

Being the High Priestess of the Church of Light sure sounds rough. She’s gotta conquer dungeons on top of that, too...

“Wait, if I heard you correctly, did you say you’re part of the reform faction?”

“Indeed. As far as my research could uncover, the past five generations of popes have all actually been the same person. I believe it is about time for him to retire,” Alca said.

Five generations, huh? I wonder what trick he’s using. Clones, maybe?

As I considered that, Alca leaned forward to whisper into my ear. “This is also the will of your former teacher, Santaku. I can trust you to provide your assistance, yes?”

“I will do what I can,” I replied, since it seemed like she was wholly fixated on me helping her. Worst-case scenario, I could simply run away.

And so my training finished safely, despite the higher-up barging in like that.

The pope visiting those facilities means he knows all about artificial dungeons, huh? And man, that pressure. It's pretty clear he's no friendly old man blissfully unaware of anything that's going on; he's got his hands firmly on the reins of this beast.

I safely reunited with Rokufa-ko and returned to the room I had been given as a traveling priest.

"Bleh, that was tiring. Time to get you up to speed," I said, but she shook her head.

"Don't sweat it, I was watching through your eyes. Though obviously I couldn't show Toi, either."

Oh, that was convenient. I could let Narikin decide whether to share it all with Toi or not, since this stuff wasn't important for her to know regardless.

"Anyway, I noticed something huge, Keima. You know how you met the pope?"

"Yup. What about him?"

Rokufa-ko looked at me carefully, then spoke. "That's Core 10. I've seen him at the assembly!"

"What?"

I mean, Alca did say the pope hadn't changed in five generations. But why is a Dungeon Core ruling the Holy Kingdom's Church of Light, a church specifically for worshiping the God of Light?

Despite feeling this was all way too suspicious, I compiled everything I had learned and sent it to Haku.

Side Chapter — The High Priestess Alca Puts the Pieces Together

My foremost disciple, a traveling priest, has returned home from a pilgrimage of dungeon destruction, and succeeded in offering one of the empire's dungeons to the God of Light. For his accomplishments I would like for him to be awarded with the status of special priest, on par with a medpriest.

Santaku, an archpriest of the reform faction, had sent in a request for a promotion. And then he was immediately assassinated. Alca knew the culprit was a member of the pope faction.

“Which makes this an archpriest’s dying message,” she mused. It was her duty as the High Priestess of Light to move to grant his final wish. However, she did not recall Santaku having had a traveling priest as his foremost disciple. She needed to investigate this to ensure everything was in order.

At the very least, it was certainly a splendid accomplishment in the Church of Light to offer up a dungeon (and a dungeon from *the* Laverio Empire, no less). It was such a splendid accomplishment that Santaku would be highly rewarded himself as the disciple’s master, if it was true.

The ascension to medpriest itself was no problem in the slightest. A noble from the empire truly had come and offered to turn his local dungeon into an artificial dungeon “without asking for anything in return,” despite the fact that offering a dungeon would “put one in a position to make many demands of the Church of Light.” It was set in stone that they would be rewarded with a completely free dungeon seed.

However, there would need to be some checks before training him as a specialty priest. Some functions of the artificial dungeons were still secret, and so the instructors’ personalities were carefully considered before they were trained. Even if this was Santaku’s final request, Alca could not just grant it willy-nilly.

And so she made her decision: She would grant this person the position of mednoble, see whether they were truly Santaku's disciple or not, and then decide from there whether to make him a specialty priest.

With that said, all this talk of imperial dungeons reminded her of Goren. And subsequently, its town chief, Keima. He was a wondrous man she had met while serving a tour of dungeon-destroying duty in the empire with Sento. He had been well learned in the ways of the Church of Life, and although she tempted him with excellent offers so that he would return to the Holy Kingdom with her, he rejected all of them. And when she attempted to purchase Ichika—a slave, but one of significant competence—he had not faltered for a moment, even when presented with an absurd sum of ten thousand golds. Most of all, he had risked his life to save hers, despite the fact that Alca revived upon death.

Alca knew no other man as pure and noble of heart. Just remembering it made her heart throb.

She wanted to meet him again. To make that happen, she had changed her name, and was preparing for another trip to the empire which had barred her entry. This time for sure, she would destroy that dungeon, purchase Ichika, and make Keima her own...

Her thoughts were interrupted by a report that Narikin had arrived at the church.

The archpriest's letter of recommendation had showered this Narikin with praise, saying he was highly skilled, dedicated to the church, and while he had a nondescript face perfect for infiltration missions, he was a fine man skilled in both intellectual and physical warfare.

"Good grief. As if such a man could exist. Santaku surely showered him with praise out of favoritism and nothing more," Alca said to herself. Since in the Holy Kingdom families were decided by education more than by blood, one's disciple might as well have been one's child. Alca went to see Narikin, believing the letter of recommendation to be filled with nepotism and favoritism.

"Apologies for the wait. It is nice to meet you, Narik—"

She had entered the parlor wondering what he would look like, but the moment she saw the traveling priest's face, she couldn't help but let out an "Oh

my” of surprise.

“Keima...?”

“Greetings, High Priestess. I am Narikin. It is an honor to be taught by the High Priestess herself.”

There was no mistaking that nondescript face. His hair was different, but this was unmistakably Keima, the town chief of Goren.

“Oh my? Oh my my my. So that is how it is,” Alca said. He did not falter even when she, the High Priestess, appeared unannounced. There was no room to doubt it. Keima, or rather, Narikin already knew Alca. Reason being, he, too, had multiple names. If he was a traveling priest, it made complete sense that he would be infiltrating the empire and using multiple positions of status to his advantage.

“It is nice to meet you, Narikin. I am Alca Rue Bipolar Red, but you may address me as Alca.”

She greeted him while indicating she would keep up appearances alongside him. It took all she had to not outright grin at their unexpected reunion. She could only hope her smile appeared natural.

“To think you even brought Rokuko with you. Ahaha, this is truly a blessed reunion.”

“It is an honor to meet you, High Priestess. I am Rokufa. His wife.”

“Yes, greetings, Rokufa. I hope we may continue to be good friends.”

They all understood each other completely. Nothing could feel better than that. Alca was becoming exceedingly pleased.

Narikin claimed to be Keima’s little brother, but there was no doubt they were the same person. For him to be a lay priest, it must have been at least ten years since he joined the faith. Considering Keima’s age, he must have joined the faith and become Santaku’s disciple not long after being born.

In which case, all of the praise written in Santaku’s letter of introduction suddenly seemed a lot more realistic. He was skilled in both intellectual and physical warfare, naturally, and Alca could only nod in agreement to the idea

that he was an honest and wondrous man. Then there was his face, suitable for infiltrations, and his dedication to his work. All of them pointed toward one truth.

The town of Goren had developed rapidly over the span of a few years. Its town chief, Keima, was a man with no history. And in his town, a religion without a god was being spread, with more followers joining by the day.

Where did he learn to run a town? Where did he develop the skills necessary to establish himself as nothing short of a pope? Why did Beddhism have no god to worship? All those questions had the same answer.

Keima, the town chief of Goren... was actually a Church of Light priest, infiltrating the empire! No doubt Santaku the archpriest had trained him in all the skills he displayed as town chief and pope. Beddhism had no god to leave a space for the one true god, the God of Light.

"I see, I see," Alca said. Ah, it was like a glorious shiver running through her brain. All the dots were connecting so wonderfully.

Now it all made sense why Keima had so flatly refused her invitations, and was so well learned in the ways of the Church of Light. Indeed, he certainly was dedicating his entire life to this infiltration. All for the Church of Light. He was even willing to exploit dungeons to his end.

"The recently deceased Santaku's paperwork was so unbelievably convenient I came to see what falsehoods lay behind it, but... I see my suspicions were not mistaken," Alca said. It was beyond obvious that his spirit was pure as well, considering the numerous factors including his connection to the great spirit Salamander. Would a spirit bind with a human whose spirit was impure? Absolutely not. In short, Keima... Narikin was an honest, talented, and dedicated priest.

"Erm, my apologies, but may I ask what Santaku's report said?" Narikin asked.

It was then that Alca realized she had misspoken. Her words had not been right for Narikin, who had just lost Santaku, who might as well have been a father to him. Anyone would be devastated after the loss of a parent, but Narikin had hidden his sorrow so well that Alca had not even realized her mistake.

This was the act known as solicitude in the Church of Light. It meant to act as if nothing had happened so as to not worry the one you were speaking to, and no doubt that was exactly what he was doing.

Alca felt a hint of genuine awe at the strength of his spirit. If Keima had been a High Priestess candidate in her age group, no doubt he would have won. Only girls could become the High Priestess, but magic drugs could have made it happen.

“It is unfortunate that Father Santaku passed away so suddenly after his disciple made such great accomplishments. May he find more honor across the great bridge,” Alca said.

Santaku truly had been assassinated at the most unfortunate of times. Raising a disciple who accomplished so much would lead to significant authority, and this was just before the papal election, where he could have spoken openly against the current state of affairs. Her phrasing there was a euphemism to express sympathy for one who died in such a way that they could not be revived. It meant, may their wishes be granted in the world after death.

“I certainly agree. I can only say, may Father Santaku be blessed,” Narikin said. That was generic phrasing... meant for those who had died a satisfactory death, seeking no resurrection.

In short, he was saying that Santaku’s will would live on with him.

“Ahaha, you certainly are strong, Narikin.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, nothing. And oh yes, your medpriest ring. Here you are.”

Alca handed the medpriest ring to Narikin, who was feigning innocence. He looked at the markings to ensure they were correct and nodded, which showed how thorough Santaku’s education had been.

She had to take his lay priest ring back, but it was clean as if new. Priests who left theirs in a forgotten drawer were one thing, but clean rings were rare for traveling priests.

“That is rare for a traveling priest... You must have been taking very good care

of it, hm?”

“Indeed. I performed {Purification} upon it every day from the day after Father Santaku first gave it to me to now.”

To think he respected Santaku that much. Alca felt her eyes get a little wet as she imagined Keima religiously casting {Purification} on his ring, all alone and dreaming of home.

“How wonderful. Now then, I will distribute this ahead of time, in respect of your dedication. It is the ring of a specialty priest. This is normally something delivered after training, but here you are,” Alca said. There was no longer any need for her to doubt Narikin’s legitimacy. She gave him the specialty priest’s ring at once.

“Is that wise?” he asked.

“Certainly. It is no problem at all. In the first place, Keima... Excuse me, Narikin. In the first place, I trust and value you highly. However, do take care to not display this carelessly in public.”

Far be it from Alca to let such a superb priest slip her by. She would sink her fingers into him no matter what... Which reminded her, she had promised to invite Keima to her home. Now was the perfect time to do so.

“Um, Alca... I mean, excuse me, High Priestess Alca. Could you not gaze upon my husband so?” Rokuko, or rather, Rokufa said.

“Oh my, Rokufa. But what harm is there in doing so? May the glorious be admired, I say.”

“No, no. I don’t want him getting more wives.”

“My my. That is truly an alien opinion to have in this holy land of the light,” Alca said. One of the Holy Kingdom would welcome their husband getting more wives. Ideally, one would have as many wives and husbands as possible. For her to disagree would have to mean...

“I mean, I’m not from this country, so yeah,” Rokufa said, puffing out her chest. Ah, of course. Narikin had dedicated his life to infiltrating the empire, and so it only made sense he would take a wife outside of the Holy Kingdom. To do

so would draw less suspicion.

However, the fact he had brought her here must have meant that he was planning to end his mission soon and build a family in the Holy Kingdom.

“Speaking of which, where is Ichika?” Alca asked, curious about why she did not see the servant she had grown to appreciate so much.

“I see you brought your beastkin slave instead, but... Oh? Oh my my. I see no ears or tail... Did you perhaps cut them off?”

“A beastkin slave, you say? You must be thinking of someone else. Isn’t that right, Toi?” Narikin said, and the small maid smiled. That was not an expression she had ever made back in Goren.

“For the sake of my lord’s honor, there is much I must keep secret,” Toi said, putting a finger over her lips in a cute fashion. Was this her true self? It was so different she truly did seem like someone else entirely. Impressive.

“Oh my! My my, I see. I was truly deceived. Your acting is something to behold. Ohoho... You have quite stimulating taste, Narikin,” Alca said. It was unfortunate that Ichika was not here, but she was fast taking a liking to this little girl. That said... Degrading humans by dressing them as beastkin? That was certainly an intense fetish indeed.

“Ahaha,” Narikin laughed evasively. That said, he seemed to know it was not a fetish to display in public, and there would be no problem with him enjoying it privately. Alca found herself feeling compelled to ask him what ears would suit her, even.

From there, Narikin easily learned everything Alca taught him, entirely as if he knew it already. He was a skilled student. He already had the manasight needed to become a specialty priest, which he might have learned from Santaku.

After some simple tests, Alca nodded in satisfaction at Narikin’s excellent performance. “Excellent. You are truly a wonderful, brilliant student. And with that, let us move onto observing a fully functioning artificial dungeon,” she said, and then guided him to the facility beneath the church.

“In truth, we are producing artificial dungeons farther down this way.”

“Should I be allowed in here?”

“It’s no problem at all, as you are a specialty priest. Furthermore, you do have my faith, Narikin,” Alca said, guiding him while making her affection clear.

The artificial Dungeon Core she guided them to had been one she had shown Keima before. She went with a more simple explanation this time.

“High Priestess. Is anything else made here?” Narikin had asked midway through her explanation, cutting ahead to things she had not even intended to explain. Alca was hit with an overwhelming impression that she was the one having her abilities as an instructor being tested rather than the other way around. And on top of that, he swiftly learned to manipulate even the most complex of systems.

That reminded her... The prototype artificial dungeons were more complex beasts than the modern systems. Perhaps Narikin had received training with them before becoming a traveling priest.

And then, when they finally finished their training, an unexpected visitor arrived.

“Now, now, High Priestess Alca. What might you be doing here? Who is this man?” the pope asked. It was none other than the highest authority in the Holy Kingdom, and the head of the Church of Light. He was also Alca’s adoptive father.

“Your holiness. This is Father Narikin, a medpriest. He achieved great things as a traveling priest, and has just been assigned to be a specialty priest. He is undergoing training at the moment,” Alca said. Narikin swiftly lowered his head without saying anything. Alca thought he had been overwhelmed by the pope’s pressure, but that didn’t seem to be the case. The pope asked him to raise his head, and spoke to him.

“Hrm, you’re a young man with potential. Continue dedicating yourself to the faith.”

“Yes, your holiness. I am moved by your praise.”

The pope patted him on his shoulder. It seemed he had taken a liking to Narikin, which was rare for him. Alca didn’t yet know whether that would be a

good or bad thing.

“So, your holiness, why *are* you here?” Alca asked again.

“Ahaha, the truth is, I heard you were here with a man, Alca. Consider me nosy all you like, but I came to see for myself. Though I knew that if anything happened, you could manage on your own. You’re a strong girl.”

“Oh my my. Goodness, your holiness, whatever are you saying?” Alca asked. She was too thrown off by being teased in that way in front of Narikin to give a proper response, and so simply gave a refined giggle.

“I shall be off then. Try to keep your romantic meetings to a minimum, even if they are out of sight. Blessed be the light.”

“My goodness, your holiness. Blessed be the light.”

“Blessed be the light,” Narikin said. Alca felt it was strange that he would say only the bare minimum in reply to the pope. This wasn’t just him being too nervous to speak, either. Was Narikin with all his knowledge of the Church of Light conflicted about the pope in some way? Well... Of course. It was the pope who had killed his father figure Santaku. Realizing that made Alca feel conflicted.

“You are certainly on good terms with his holiness the pope. I suppose I should expect nothing less from the High Priestess?”

“Oh, stop it, Narikin. I can be both a member of the reform faction and a granddaughter who adores her grandfather.”

“I had no intention of offending, but my apologies if I did. I am not the most learned in social matters. This is the first I am hearing of you being the pope’s granddaughter, High Priestess.”

That felt off to Alca. However, after a moment of thought, it all made sense.

“Oh yes, you were traveling through foreign countries until just the other day. And although you were Father Santaku of the reform faction’s disciple, you were not informed in matters of politics and social relations. You truly are a proper priest, Narikin,” Alca said with a smile, explaining to Narikin the High Priestess candidate system. Candidates were taken in by the pope while young,

and put through a rigorous education system. That said, this practice was not part of the Church of Light's bible. It was done to preserve the pope's power throughout the generations.

Indeed, the power of the pope.

Alca fit the puzzle pieces together within her brain.

Santaku, a priest of the reform faction that opposed the pope. Narikin, his disciple whose existence he had kept hidden. The thorough education he had received. His abilities running a town, his knowledge of a church's internal structure, and his experiencing leading one.

If one put the pieces together... Alca saw that the completed picture could only mean one thing.

Narikin was an illegitimate child of the Holy Kingdom's royal family. The final piece to prove this was within Alca's memory.

On second thought, Keima did in fact have black hair. It was not rare for people in the Holy Kingdom to have black hair, due to the country's deep connection with Heroes. In particular, much of the royal family residing within the holy capital of Figure Head was of Hero blood. Narikin currently had brown hair, but... There existed magic potions to change the color of one's hair. However, potions to change one's hair to black were forbidden to all those but the royal family, since it was a color which reflected the divinity best represented by Heroes.

And on closer inspection, Narikin's facial features did somewhat resemble that of the royal family.

That made all the pieces fit together perfectly. The lines connected and formed a complete, brilliant whole.

There was no doubt about it. Narikin was a member of the royal family. She had no way of confirming this with Santaku, who no doubt had known the truth, but the fact Santaku was killed as soon as Narikin returned made it seem all the more likely.

And most of all, there was Narikin himself. He was a man of extraordinary talents and abilities that would change everything. Whether his impact would

be for better or worse was up to how Alca handled him, but... She recalled the words of the first-ever High Priestess. *When a tidal wave approaches, we have no choice but to ride it.*

“Wait, if I heard you correctly, did you say you’re part of the reform faction?” Narikin asked. Had he not already noticed? Or no, perhaps he only considered people allies when they expressly named themselves such. In which case, her answer here would change everything. Alca the High Priestess steeled her resolve.

“Indeed. As far as my research could uncover, the past five generations of popes have all actually been the same person. I believe it is about time for him to retire,” Alca said.

Five generations. Upon hearing that, Narikin gave a small look of surprise. The pope was, using some unknown form of magic, turning his back to the natural way of the world and extending his lifespan. In public events he would always wear a veil, and with each generation he simply changed his name to give the appearance of being replaced. He was an unnatural existence that had no place in the proper Church of Light.

Narikin’s appearance was a perfect opportunity to do something about it.

“This is also the will of your former teacher, Santaku. I can trust you to provide your assistance, yes?”

“I will do what I can,” Narikin replied.

His answer was cautious. But one had to be cautious to do battle with the pope faction.

Alca felt herself smile; he was proving to be a reliable ally indeed.

Side Chapter — Soto Killing Time

While Keima was off in the Holy Kingdom, Soto had her own job to do... Or not.

As Keima and Rokuko's daughter, she was treated as a princess in both the town and the dungeon itself, meaning she was waited on hand and foot.

"Bweeh. I'm bored."

She had tried to help with the inn, only to be told that wasn't something for the owner's daughter to be doing, and to get the town chief's permission first (only for him to naturally refuse). She effortlessly solved some math homework that was tossed at her to kill time, and ultimately she really just had nothing to do.

The only thing she had to do was, at best, check over her own functionalities, and take care of her dungeon. That, and making her favorite socks with {Teensy Reproduction}. She had a very fulfilling life, but at the same time she had grown bored of it.

"...Ah! I know, I'll prank papa!" she exclaimed, a brilliant idea interrupting her bored waiting. Sure, Keima was hiding away in the Master Room, but Soto's {Storage} dungeon was connected to everything. And so, she invited Niku to sneak in with her. Why Niku? Because when he got mad at her, it would be better for her to have an ally than be alone! Niku was in the middle of work, but with the shift system she easily managed to get someone to take her place.

"Soto. Will you pull the prank knowing they will get mad?" Niku asked.

"Of course! Absolutely! After all, this is my revenge for papa and mama abandoning their duty as parents and neglecting me! Really, they should be the ones getting yelled at! I can just tell Haku all about this and she'll protect me!"

"I don't think they're neglecting you..."

"Papa and mama are going off to the Holy Kingdom all on their own to play with Toi! Don't you think that's unfair, Niku?"

Niku's tail twitched.

"Also, I know that while they're playing in the Holy Kingdom, their bodies are totally defenseless. How could I NOT prank them?! We can even smell them as much as we want, y'know?"

Niku's tail twitched repeatedly. What an alluring proposition. "...Just this once."

"There we go!"

Niku succumbed to the devil's sweet temptation and nodded.

They went through the {Storage} dungeon to get to the Master Room. There was a small room built in the corner of the room away from all the busily working fairies. Inside, Keima was sleeping soundly within a futon. There was a separate futon for Rokuko, but it wasn't being used at the moment.

Soto confirmed Keima was in the middle of using [Possession] and wouldn't wake up, then gave a nasty grin.

"What is the plan? I will stop anything too dangerous," Niku said.

"Geheheheh. Take a look at this," Soto said, taking out a pair of loose socks. They weren't recreations of socks, but were rather socks she had bought with her own DP from the catalog. Perhaps due to having inherited Keima's genes, or perhaps due to her profoundly honed love of socks, Soto could buy a portion of Japanese goods with DP: that portion being exclusively socks.

"I will make him wear these!"

"I see...?"

It was such a minor prank Niku did not know what to think of it. She decided to let it happen.

"Niku, you can go smell papa's armpit or stomach or whatever. I'll be putting these on his feet, so those are off limits... Oh, wait. Smell him. I order you to smell him. That's more convenient for you, right?"

Niku swallowed hard. She had no choice but to obey an order. Niku fled down the path provided to her and slid into Keima's futon as if being sucked in.

“Okaaaay, and now time for prank two,” Soto said, taking out a certain potion with a grin. It was the potion for changing one’s sex... Tee Es. She had found it in the DP catalog and thought it looked funny, so she bought one. It was a bit expensive, at 2000 DP for the kind that lasted one night, but Keima had given her all she needed when she said she wanted DP to buy potions to test out her functions. Like taking candy from a baby. And after buying one, she could recreate it infinitely with her {Teensy Reproduction}. Thus, she could use it for pranks without ever feeling any pain in her pocket!

“Excelsior!”

Soto mercilessly splashed the Tee Es over Keima. His body morphed into that of a girl, without him waking up due to being in the process of possession. His hair grew down to his hips, and his chest puffed out. His Adam’s apple disappeared, and his body shrunk, looking a bit more rounded.

Incidentally, she had already confirmed that when using duplicated potions, the effects continued on even after the one hour had passed and the potion would have disappeared. Which meant, in short, the potion would still take effect all night. He would doubtlessly wake up and be shocked to see himself as a girl. Eheheheheheh.

“Soto? What did you do to Master?” Niku asked.

“I was experimenting to see if papa’s smell changes when he’s a girl. What do you think?”

“That is a good experiment... Hm.”

Niku buried her face in Keima’s newly-grown boobs. They were as large as Ichika’s, and extremely soft. But she could only smell the scent already steeping in his jersey.

“The smell must not be strong since he just morphed, hm? Niku, get under his clothes and smell him directly. This is an order!”

“D-Directly? Understood.”

Niku slid under his clothes as instructed. There was plenty of room for doing so thanks to his body having shrunk. Niku rested her nose in the base between Keima’s large boobs and, while feeling his soft skin on her nose, inhaled deeply.

“...It does feel different. But this is Master’s smell.”

“I see. So it’s different, but you can still tell?”

“If I didn’t know, I would think this was his sister.”

It was a similar smell, then. Soto nodded with satisfaction at this scientific result.

“Okaaay, now let’s finally get these socks on papa’s girl feet! Heheheh, these will be ultra rare for sure!” Soto exclaimed, digging into the futon and getting her hands on Keima’s cute, bare feet.

“Oh, ultra rare, huh?”

“Well yeah, I mean... Wait, what?”

Soto had reflexively responded to the cute-sounding voice, but on second thought it wasn’t one she remembered. She swiftly looked up and saw Keima, now awake, staring at her with narrowed eyes. One certainly didn’t wake up while possessing others, but on the other hand, when the possession ended they would wake up immediately.

“Hey. Don’t try to put the socks on me anyway.”

“But! But your feet are right here!!!”

“Quit it! Niku, jeez, what’re you doing?”

From there, Keima punished Soto for her prank with ten spansks. Niku had enthusiastically held out her butt to be spanked, too, but that just resulted in her getting no spansks at all, which made her tail droop sadly.

Chapter 3

Once again we were giving our report to Haku at a beach tea party. This time, Soto was participating, too. I felt she was way too rude to bring anywhere near Haku, but Haku specified she should come, so that was that. In fact, she had complained that she didn't know why I hadn't brought her last time.

"Hi again, auntie!"

"Welcome, Soto... Oh my my, that tickles."

Haku smiled as Soto hugged her. She usually only looked this pleased when talking to Rokuko... *Hey, Soto! Don't rub your cheeks against the bits of her thighs exposed by the slit of her dress!*

"Aaah... I love you... You really are a goddess," Soto moaned.

Indeed, she is the goddess of the Ivory Church. Now let go of her, please? Please?

I shook my head to clear it and began the report.

"And that's that. I think we'll destroy the facility once we get our dungeon seed."

"Keima... You have certainly brought me information of incredible worth this time," Haku said.

"Er, what are you referring to, exactly?" I asked. There were so many things she could be referring to, it was hard to know precisely what she was talking about.

"All of it. The facility that produces artificial Dungeon Cores, for one; also the rules for placing dungeon seeds, and how it is done. Do show me the footage of all this later."

The credit for the footage all went to Rokuko. She had checked Narikin's vision through the monitor, and recorded it while she was at it. That allowed me to realize we could use the monitor to share information even when leaving

the birds in the inn room.

“And of course, the information about the pope.”

“Right... Him being Core 10, according to Rokuko?”

“Precisely. The Holy Kingdom is the enemy to all dungeons. If it is truly led by a Core, it would change everything. Thus, I would like to see what you have on him first before anything.”

“Er, sure. Rokuko, you know what to do.”

“Okaaaay. One sec.”

At Haku’s urging, Rokuko made her monitor visible and showed footage of the pope’s face from when he went to check on the facility.

“Hm, I see... But, hm... I suppose he might look like Core 10, if you put it that way?”

“Um, Haku? This is obviously Core 10,” Rokuko said.

“Don’t all human faces look more or less the same?” Haku asked, tilting her head. It seemed that she struggled to notice small differences between faces.

“Don’t all humans look like this after some decades? One can modify their age when in human form, so this is not entirely reliable.”

“I’m starting to lose confidence now...”

Yeah, I guess any given old person will look a bit similar to an old person you know. And that could be amplified since Rokuko doesn’t know many old people to begin with.

“Mama, auntie. I don’t even know what Core 10 looks like. Do you have any photos of him? Maybe we could compare them?”

“I do, Soto. Look,” Haku said, displaying an image of an older guy who looked a bit like the pope, but not identical.

“They look kinda like different people now. Ngh, if only their socks were shown!”

“Is this really what he looked like?” Rokuko asked. “Haku, how many years ago did you take this?”

“One hundred years ago or so, I believe... Perhaps I have a newer one.”

Haku put up another image. However, it was yet another face, similar only in that it was that of an old man. Almost as if he was changing it regularly, to keep his human identity a secret.

“...Haku. From a human’s perspective, I would say all of these look like different people.”

“Indeed. One could simply mark it off as coincidence. However, it is highly suspicious,” Haku said, sighing and picking up her cup of tea. Really, the very fact Core 10 was changing his face so often was suspicious.

“Leona might know something about this,” I said.

“I will interrogate her, but do not expect much.”

She had already extracted all she could from Leona. Apparently she had copied the parasite she stuck on Core 564’s arm from the Holy Kingdom.

“Incidentally, isn’t the pope the head of the Holy Kingdom? I feel like you would have met him before as the head of the empire, Haku.”

“The pope certainly is the de facto leader of the Holy Kingdom. However, there is the royal family providing a front, and the pope has never left the country. Furthermore, the pope always wears a veil when on public occasions. This video footage of his bare face is quite valuable.”

It was apparently a magic veil that prevented one from even seeing through the cracks. *You know, I never really thought about the Holy Kingdom having a king before. Even though, uh, the name makes it extremely obvious that there is one.*

“Still, a medpriest is one thing, but you even managed to secure the status of specialty priest. That position is highly valuable. May I ask you to continue your infiltration? Of course, I will raise your pay to match.”

“I’ll do what I can, though I can’t promise I’ll be able to expose the pope’s identity.”

“No matter. There is no time limit. Let’s see... For now, aim to rise in status to archpriest.”

“Roger.” I nodded.

From there, we finished the tea party, and as payment for my report I received five hundred golds, which also covered any business costs. Good grief, working for the government sure earned a lot of cash. That explained why Wataru could constantly afford to pay a hundred golds per month.

Giving Narikin’s group money and more time off was an option, but the funds I had given them before were pretty depleted. I decided to just send all five hundred golds to them, to refill their stock and pay them for their services.

“Soto. I want you to stealthily deliver funds to Toi. Could you sneak into Narikin’s {Storage} for me?”

“Whoa now! My services’ll cost you a hefty fee, papa!”

“Sure. You can tell Ichika I told her to give you her socks. The fresh ones she has on at the moment, obviously.”

“Deal!”

And so, with Ichika’s socks as a payment, I sent the goods off. Now I just had to possess Narikin and move it from {Storage} to {Wallet}.

“Funny that she wouldn’t want money or DP either. Like father like daughter,” Rokuko said, having been observing.

In any case, I should probably give Narikin’s group more time off. They could rest until the artificial Dungeon Core is ready. Hopefully they would actually rest this time.

* * *

I thought of several ways for Narikin’s group to contact us.

For the less urgent things, they could put a letter in {Storage} for Soto to notice and give me. For more urgent things, they could crush spiders that I had made Named monsters (Mr. Possessimmediately and Mr. Sendcontact), which I would notice through the list of Named monsters marking them as deceased.

Anyway, after a bit of them having fun on vacation, I heard from Elka that an urgent request for contact had come in, so I immediately moved to the Master Room.

I revived the spider that had nobly died (Mr. Possessimmediately) and possessed Narikin. Once that was done, I found myself in the room for traveling priests that Narikin was staying in.

“(Alca the High Priestess is visiting. She is inviting you to her home,)” Tran (Narikin) said through telepathy. Rokufa woke up next to me and got up. Seemed that Rokuko had possessed her as well.

“Mm, what’s the situation?” There was a pause. “Okay. We definitely do need to be the ones to talk to her, or she’ll notice something’s off,” Rokufa-ko said, having heard the situation from Ceiver (Rokufa).

“She won’t exactly be trying to invite us to the church now, but I don’t really want her selling us weird cleaning stuff or feather beds or something... Toi, how would refusing the invitation go down?”

“Putting aside the feather bed nonsense, it will be difficult to turn the High Priestess down after she came here herself rather than sending a servant. After all, we told her to wait just a moment while we prepared to leave.”

Eh, yeah. We’re already in the Church of Light, and if she tries to sell us stuff, we might as well buy it to earn her trust. Just gotta play the part of Narikin.

“Think we should bring the birds?”

“I believe that will be fine. I will accompany you, my lord,” Toi said, respectfully bowing her head.

Waiting too long would be suspicious, so we swiftly went out to where Alca was waiting.

“Apologies for the wait, High Priestess.”

“Ahaha, it seems I must be the one to apologize, Narikin. Were you in the middle of something?” Alca asked, watching Rokufa-ko comb her hair straight.

“Not at all; we were just sleeping a bit. So, it seems you are inviting us to your home?”

“Indeed. Did I not once promise to invite you to my humble abode? In truth, I was waiting for you to bring it up yourself, but it became apparent you would never come, so I did so myself.”

“Was that promise not with my older brother?”

“Oh yes, I suppose. Regardless, will you accept my invitation?” Alca asked with a bright smile. *Hahaha, screw you.*

That said, it would benefit our mission to talk to the High Priestess, so I decided to roll with it. I wanted to ask about what I needed to do to become an archpriest regardless.

We went to the High Priestess’s house, with Rokufa-ko locking her arms with mine and Toi following from behind. A tea party was held in the garden of her estate within the church district, a roofed garden made of white stone with streams of water like the church. I sipped the high-quality tea, while ignoring the feeling that I had been doing nothing but attending tea parties lately. It didn’t seem to be poisoned.

“I see you are used to drinking black tea,” Alca observed.

“Indeed, an associate of mine drinks it often,” I replied. I was pretty sure Haku drank black tea produced in the Holy Kingdom. This tasted the same. *I mean, I don’t have the most cultured taste, but it’s pretty obvious. Like, even the smell is the same.*

“Apologies that I could not bring any gifts of my own,” I continued, this having been too sudden for any of that.

“Oh, think nothing of it. I am just glad to have you here, Narikin. And Father Santaku was just sent to the country of light. I heard that... you did not even attend his funeral, and gambled in an outer district to distract yourself.”

That’s how Narikin spent his time off again...?

“(Verily, I had my fill of rest,)” came Tran’s message from within the birdcage. Obviously.

“If there is anything I can do for you as the High Priestess... No, as Alca, then please say so.”

“Er, no, I wouldn’t dare put a burden on...” I paused mid sentence. Actually, this was a good opportunity. I could ask about how to become an archpriest, which Haku had instructed me to do.

“In that case, could you tell me how I might become an archpriest?”

“Ah! You may count on me, Narikin. I will do all I can,” Alca said, a radiant smile blooming on her face for some reason.

Well, I suppose she and Santaku were both from the reform faction.

Archpriests must be pretty big deals, and it makes sense she'd want to fill the hole Santaku left with me. That must be it. Even if there were only a limited number of seats for archpriests, one just happened to have opened up.

The High Priestess began her lecture.

“To become an archpriest, you must receive approval from an archpriest or above, and complete a trial. I will provide a recommendation for you, which should certainly solve the approval process. But to receive the trial, you must put forth a one-hundred-gold donation. If you do not have that much, I shall lend it to you. Or better yet, I will buy that much shortcake and whipped cream off of you.”

“No need for that. I can pay with my pocket money. Though as thanks for all your help, I will look into bringing whipped cream over.”

“Wonderful.”

I didn't want to owe the High Priestess any debts, and Haku was covering our costs regardless. The only problem was where to take it from... Though it didn't really matter.

“As for the trial, it is actually three trials, which will be arbitrated by an archpriest selected to serve as overseer. However, one of those trials is, without fail, to ‘show a miracle.’ Thus, this entire process will be predicated on the fact that you can perform a miracle.”

“A miracle? Such as?”

“In my case, I have inherited the miracle of revival from the previous High Priestess. As another example... The pope can perform the miracle of resurrection. One individual in my care performed the miracle of bodily amputation using Restoration skills.”

“Bodily amputation?” I asked. What came to mind with that was the old

magic trick wherein someone got in a box that got cut in half by an assistant.

“Indeed. By using Restoration while their body parts were amputated, they could fight even while their limbs were being cut off, by immediately reattaching them. The person in question was a candidate for High Priestess in the previous generation.”

“I see... Isn’t that just the work of a pain resistance skill, or just guts?”

“Skills and abilities far above an average human will all be considered miracles. Especially rare skills are recognized as miracles. After all, skills are one form of miracle the God of Light has blessed us with.”

This all originated from the fact the archpriest position was meant for Heroes (although not a single Hero was an archpriest at the moment), with Hero skills being treated as miracles. In which case, worst-case scenario, my {Ultra Transformation} should pass the test immediately. Not that I would actually use it here.

“Incidentally, Father Santaku performed the miracle of mind-reading.”

“Oh, such a skill exists?” I asked. Core 50 of the Demon Realm had that, too.

“Indeed. He could identify which of three cards the target selected. Ten times in a row, no less!”

Wait, cards? This is starting to sound like a parlor trick.

“And that is not all. He could continually make his target select the only card of three which had a red X mark.”

Yeah, that’s gotta just be a parlor trick.

“Let me see... Father Ragil, of the pope faction, was able to perform the miracle of using {Teleportation} without a chant, all on his own. As a large group of priests watched, he teleported from one box to another.”

“Oho...”

I could do that as Keima, but unfortunately, Narikin didn’t have {Teleportation}, nor the mana for it... but either way, a priest knowing {Teleportation} didn’t seem too unreasonable.

“At the time, the box Father Ragil entered was locked shut and covered in chains, such that it was sealed completely.”

Okay, it's another trick.

“Furthermore, I am told he can teleport things other than himself; he once teleported a ball from one cup to another.”

I don't think I need to even say anything at this point.

I asked about the other archpriests, and about half of them seemed to have passed the trial with blatant sleight of hand. I ended up getting the feeling that the word ‘miracle’ was used very lightly in this world, even in the Holy Kingdom itself.

Maybe I should just perform some sleight of hand myself?

That thought made me notice the hand-sized oranges served with the tea. I picked one up, stuck my thumb into the soft side, held it to the High Priestess, and opened all of my other fingers wide.

“Flotaaation,” I said.

“Ah?!”

I wiggled the orange up and down, causing Alca to jump out of her chair with a clatter in sheer shock.

“What are you doing, dear?” Rokoku asked; she was sitting beside me, so naturally she could see my thumb sticking into it. Alca calmed down and peered behind it as well.

“...Narikin. Please do not surprise me like that.”



“(Master, if that’s enough to work, I can show you how to pop off your thumb!)” Narikin said, having learned the trick at a gambling den. I guessed how Alca would react to that, and wisely elected not to go through with it.

“Oh yes, that reminds me—would telepathically communicating with a bird be considered a miracle?”

“A bird?” Alca asked, looking at the birdcage Toi was holding behind me. “It is said the first High Priestess was a skilled tamer, so perhaps it would pass if you focus on that element. Though it will depend on the judge.”

“I see, so it depends on how the judge feels. I should think of what to do after the judge is decided, then.”

“Excuse me? You make it sound like you have a repertoire of miracles to choose from, Narikin.”

Oops. Pretend I didn’t say anything.

“Putting that aside, it seems that there is much status and bureaucracy involved here... Will your recommendation and the hundred golds truly suffice?” I asked.

“Quite. If you were not a medpriest, that would be a problem, but you are. I will get right on this, as you already fulfill all the requirements,” she replied. My attempt to forcibly get the conversation back on track had succeeded. “Under normal circumstances I would need to more thoroughly lay the groundwork while you achieved various accomplishments, but... I will force it through, with Father Santaku needing a replacement to serve as a shield.”

Oh, she’s going to force it through? I’m not in a big rush, but I suppose faster is better when it comes to filling the hole Santaku left.

I gave Alca the one hundred golds and accepted the trials.

Incidentally, I had Narikin show me the thumb trick after she left, and he actually just pulled off his thumb. *C’mon, they’ll figure out you’re a Living Armor... They might treat you like a zombie, alright? Don’t take it out. Don’t even pretend.*

* * *

Tomorrow came. Narikin went to the church to take the archpriest trials. This time, I was watching over Narikin while possessing Tran.

Because I mean, I didn't know the Church of Light's formalities and such. If Narikin hadn't studied the proper conduct of a priest with Toi in case something like this happened, we might have just lost the game then and there. Alca had said this would be fast, but it really was way too fast.

Thus, I was watching through the monitor while waiting in their room. If something happened, I might need to temporarily return and possess them.

They were taken to the pope's audience chamber in the church with the High Priestess. They bowed to the empty throne, at which point the pope with his veiled face slowly walked forward from behind it and sat down.

"Raise your heads," he said, and Narikin did. There were three other priests with the pope. One old man, one middle-aged man, and one old woman.

"At the recommendation of Alca Rue Bipolar the High Priestess, we now submit Father Narikin the medpriest, disciple of Father Santaku the Archpriest, to undergo the archpriest trials. Serving as arbitrators shall be Ragil, Barakd, and Magni. Santaku's light fading has left a hole of darkness, but we must not repeat the errors of Zahan. May Erin's eyes guide us down the proper path. May the God of Light be blessed," the pope stated, and with that, everyone lowered their heads again. He stood up and left through behind the throne again. I had to question what the point of him sitting at all had been, then asked Rokufa about what I hadn't understood.

"(What was that about Zahan's errors and Erin's eyes?)"

"They trace the legends of the Holy Kingdom. Zahan was incompetent and dragged his party members down to their deaths, while Erin saw her friends' hidden talents and brought the best out of them. In short, he was telling the guards to cut you down without mercy if you are incompetent," Rokufa explained.

That made sense. And as I was nodding to myself, Toi clarified. "Apologies, my lady, but your interpretation of Erin is a bit off. To begin with, my lord is not a member of the pope faction. They meant in this instance, 'he is not an ally of our faction, so be harsh.' This could also be interpreted as an invitation for my

lord to join the pope faction, in return for a more generous evaluation.”

Apparently, Erin had only been able to identify the talents of those she was close with. *What the hell? That’s such a pain in the neck!*

“But they used this phrasing precisely because one could also understand it with your interpretation, milady. It was intentionally deceptive for justification purposes. Not easy to understand in the least.”

“I see, I still have far to go.”

“(…Er, nah, I think you’ve studied more than enough.)” I couldn’t really tell her not to study during her break, though, because their work ethic was really saving my bacon here.

In any case, Narikin would be able to start his trials without issue. Once the pope left, the three priests—Ragil, Barakd, Magni—stepped before him. From the pope’s previous statements, one could tell Ragil was the old man, Barakd was the middle-aged man, and Magni was the old woman. Magni gave Alca a friendly smile, but the two men just wore sneers.

“Why hello, Alca. I did not expect you to recommend anyone for the archpriest trials. We were just about to find a replacement for the honorable Father Santaku ourselves,” the old man said.

“Is that so, Father Ragil? Then there should be no problem at all, for who better to serve in Father Santaku’s place than his disciple Father Narikin?”

“About that. Despite my long relationship with Santaku, he never once mentioned anything about some disciple named Narikin. Not a single time. Now isn’t that something, Barakd?”

“Indeed. It is as Father Ragil says. Is there a disciple who would not attend his master’s funeral? It is hard to imagine. And so, we would like to test their relationship as well through these trials,” Barakd said with a grin. I was pretty sure Ragil was the head of the pope faction and the one responsible for assassinating Santaku, so that would make these two Narikin’s enemies. Not that I would really mind joining the pope faction, honestly.

“Enough of that, you two,” Magni said. “Apologies for all of them, Alca. But I, too, will be strict in this exam; expect no favors.”

“Of course. I would ask for nothing else, Mother Magni.”

Judging by Alca’s reaction, that was a fairly friendly greeting.

“Now then, Medpriest Narikin. I will cut to the chase and present to you your first trial,” Barakd said.

“Yes, father!” Narikin said, kneeling as Barakd took out a piece of parchment.

“Construct a bridge crossing the Dreadcliff Gorge! Your time limit is one week!” Barakd declared.

“What?! The Dreadcliff Gorge, and only one week?! This is an outrage, Father Barakd!” Alca exclaimed, but Narikin ignored her and bowed his head.

“It will be done,” he said, accepting the parchment from Barakd. Alca watched the exchange with her mouth agape, frozen.

“Oho. An immediate response, hm? Not bad. If I were thirty years younger, boy, I would’ve made you my husband on the spot for that,” Magni cackled.

“Surely a man recommended by the High Priestess herself can accomplish this much, no?”

“Do not be ridiculous, Father Barakd. The Dreadcliff Gorge is three days away by carriage. How will he construct an entire bridge in four days, on a mountain filled with monsters?!”

“It would not be a test of his abilities if it were not difficult, High Priestess.”

It seemed this was quite the difficult task from Alca’s perspective. Narikin, however, seemed completely composed.

“Rather, I am thankful the task is so forgiving. It is like drinking a barrel of wine for Migiwa,” Narikin said, which meant “It’s extremely easy.”

Barakd raised his brows. “To be clear, it cannot be considered a bridge unless carriages can cross it, understood? Hm?”

“Of course.” Narikin bowed his head deeply. Alca watched on with a conflicted expression, not saying anything.

* * *

“Master, I leave the rest to you,” Narikin said, immediately bowing to me

upon returning to his room. I had thought he had some plan for the bridge, but apparently he was going to dump it all on me.

“(You didn’t have any plan for doing it yourself...?)”

“Hm? Your Narikin identity was that of a construction mage to begin with, so I thought it would be your specialty...”

“(Okay, fair, that’s true.)”

Right, that’s why Narikin was so needlessly confident... Well, alright then. It actually is kind of my specialty. Still, Narikin’s speed came from preparation. A bridge in four days will be a bit... Well, it does depend on the size. I guess I could do a ten-meter bridge in a day if I tried really hard.

If this Dreadcliff Gorge place was a kilometer wide, four days would be a bit rough... I’d need to go there myself. The fact I’m not saying it’s impossible shows how strong I’ve gotten.

“(Do you know where it is?)”

“Indeed. The parchment describing the trial identifies the place for the bridge. The gorge is about ten meters wide.”

“(Oh, that’s pretty small.)” In fact, it was so much smaller than expected I was a bit suspicious of it.

“As this is an archpriest trial, Master, it seems they cannot give trials that they could not complete themselves as fellow archpriests.”

I see. In short, the judges held a discussion and produced trials they could all do. Though, wouldn’t that mean there were backdoors for making this trial easier? On closer inspection, I saw that the parchment specified “a bridge for humans.” In short, it actually only needed to carry people.

Okay, if not for Narikin being needlessly smug, they probably would’ve let a crappy rope bridge pass. The fact it just says “construction period: 1 week” also implies the time could start once I arrived. Sheesh, Narikin sure made this harder for no reason.

“Oh? My lord, do you have the means to solve this problem swiftly?”

“Ahaha, of course. But as this is a secret within secrets, not even you can see

it, Toi.”

“(Narikin! Don’t leak that we have aces up our sleeves.)”

“Ah! M-My apologies! Erm, well, in any case, I will have to go alone this time due to the pressing deadline. Do look after the room in my absence.”

And the way he said “even you”... He sure considers Toi an ally now, doesn’t he? Well, I guess I can’t blame him; I sent him off on this journey right after he was born, so in reality he’s spent more time with Toi than he has with me. That said, if Toi isn’t coming, I can just send materials through the {Storage} dungeon, or even go myself. Easy win!

“Master, the High Priestess has lent us a fast horse. I believe you can arrive in two days through the use of Restoration magic. Though she said you will need to supply your own materials when you arrive.”

“(Then we better get going. Moving back to regular contact schedule for now.)”

Okaaay, time to think about what kind of bridge to make... But wait, what bridges are even normal in the Holy Kingdom?

High Priestess Alca’s Perspective

Five days had passed since the first trial began.

The Dreadcliff Gorge was said to have been carved into the earth when a Hero unleashed an ultimate attack against a demon. No plants grew upon its craggy slopes, and Narikin’s task was to build a bridge to cross its expanse. Alca was waiting for him there.

The wreckage of what seemed to be an old wooden bridge of the past was there at the specified location. Furthermore, avalanches and other causes had turned the ten-meter expanse into what seemed more like fifteen meters at a glance. To put it simply, it was impossible to build a bridge across it in one week to begin with. And to make matters worse, it did not seem that construction had even begun.

“Narikin... Where are you?” Alca whispered to herself.

She had lent the fastest, strongest horse in her possession to Narikin, and speedily followed so that she could at least guard him as he worked. And yet, despite having arrived two days ago, she had not yet met Narikin, with her waiting being interrupted only by bird-type monsters such as Harpies and Yellow Hawks. The monsters here were strong, but no stronger than a Lesser Wyvern at most, so they were not threatening to Alca, but the waiting itself hurt.

Then, a single lone wagon came rolling this way. She looked up with a start, her face full of hope, only to see that riding the carriage was not Narikin, but rather the judge Magni. She had been a candidate for High Priestess in the previous generation, and through those shared experiences Alca had become friendly with her on a personal level.

“My my! What might you be doing here, Alca?” Magni asked.

“Mother Magni...” Alca said, looking at her friend with a tearful expression. Magni deduced the situation from Alca’s reaction and the unconquered expanse. Her expression stiffened.

“Don’t tell me... The boy failed and fell into the chasm?!”

“Ah!”

Alca paled further at the very thought. Why had the previously ten-meter chasm grown in size? Perhaps because Narikin had made a mistake while building the bridge, and fell along with the rubble. Alca hadn’t even considered that. She had subconsciously removed the possibility from her mind.

“Wh-Whatever shall we do?! We must form a search party at once! If that’s the case, it’s been three days already!”

“Now, now, calm down, Alca. I thought you had come in place of the boy, but it seems not,” Magni said, going to check out the cliffside. She crouched at the edge and reached out her aged hand to the craggy rocks. “Doesn’t seem like it collapsed over the past few days. Our information was more out of date than we thought.”

“O-Oh, then, is Narikin safe?”

“No doubt. You said you expected him to have arrived three days ago, no?”

Well, assuming he didn't turn tail and run, he must've noticed the loophole in the trial's rules. And between you and me, he didn't look like a quitter, and Santaku might've told him the trick before he died. Suppose I can tell it to you, then," Magni said with a cackle. Alca tilted her head.

"Loophole? To what do you refer, Mother Magni?"

"It's simple, girl. The trick is, the trial has a limit of one week, but nothing says when the week has to start," Magni said.

Alca blinked rapidly. "Erm... So, what does that mean, exactly?"

"It means you can hire people and prepare to build the bridge for as long as you like. Once you've got the materials and people all here, you can say, 'Let's get this done in a week,' and, well, that wouldn't be too hard to do. The boy could also say the week starts once he actually comes here himself, so he waits until the bridge is done to visit. That'd be an easy pass, too."

"But that is not..."

"Ahaha! Bit too much of a dirty trick for a pure-hearted saint like you, huh?"

The tension drained from Alca's shoulders. Indeed, if Narikin had noticed the loophole, he must have seen the crumbled edge of the cliff and left to prepare more thoroughly. It wouldn't even be strange for him to have erased evidence of him having come here.

"Though the bridge only had to carry people, so it's not hard at all. A simple, businesslike bridge just for getting from one end to the other... Why, you could simply place a fat log down and that'd do. Though we would've complained if he actually did just use a log."

Right. From the very start, the trial had tons of leeway. As long as one noticed the loopholes, building a bridge in one week was actually trivial.

"Barakd changed it to need carriages 'cause he's an idiot, and that makes things a bit harder, but... That's the boy's fault for talking about Migiwa's wine barrel."

Migiwa's wine barrel... In the past, a noble heard of the big drinker Migiwa, and challenged him to chug an entire barrel in one go, which Migiwa proceeded

to do effortlessly. He even went on to ask for more, which was the birth of the idiom.

In short, Narikin had said himself that a challenge to this degree would be unsatisfying to him.

“Though it would be quite the laugh if the boy bragged that much then turned tail and fled.”

“N-Narikin is not that kind of person!” Alca barked, annoyed. That just made Magni’s grin broaden.

“I thought this the other day, but you really have taken a shine to him, haven’t ya? Hah!” Alca felt a ticklish feeling as Magni slapped her on the back. “Anywho, let’s head back for today and see what happens tomorrow.”

“No, I must...”

“Don’t tell me you’re planning on meeting up with the boy looking like that?”

Hearing that, Alca recalled that she had been waiting here for about two days. She had been cleaning off the blood from monsters and whatnot with {Purification}, but this was a dungeon, so she wasn’t wearing her best outfit.

“Understood. I will do as you say, Mother Magni.”

“Alrighty, let’s head to the city. That’s where he’d be hiring, so maybe now you’ll be able to meet your lover boy!”

“I-I will get changed immediately!”

“Ahaha! C’mon now, Alca, change inside of the carriage. You’re a woman!”

And with that, Magni left the gorge with Alca. They went to the nearest city, and met someone unexpected. “...Father Barakd.”

“Oh my, High Priestess Alca. What might you be doing here?” Barakd asked with a nasty smile. Alca had been hoping to see Narikin, and so could not hide her disappointment.

“Archpriest Barakd. What’re *you* doing here?” Magni asked.

“My my, if it isn’t Mother Magni. Nothing, nothing, it’s just been almost one week. I simply came to see how the bridge was coming along.”

“Hmm...? The bridge, you say.”

Barakd had been walking from the direction of the local merchant’s guild. Magni predicted he had pressured them to not sell any materials to Narikin.

“Could you do this trial with the same kind of strings being pulled?” Magni asked.

“But of course.”

“You should hope so.”

She had asked because when one failed a trial, they could ask the archpriest judges to show them the answer and how they had done it.

“But Mother Magni, might I ask what you plan to do with such a light-looking wagon?”

“It’s a wagon I use for rest. Hard to travel with these old bones,” Magni said, at which point Alca realized her true intentions. No matter how small or light a wagon was, it was still a wagon. This wagon could possibly cross even a small, cruddy bridge. In short, Magni was throwing Narikin a bone.

“Good grief. I don’t know about a judge aiding a competitor like this.”

“Consider it canceling out your own string-pulling. Pot and kettle, no?”

The two archpriests smiled at each other. They were both pleasant smiles, the likes of which one could only develop after spending so many years as archpriests; no matter how blatantly false they were, one still registered the two as good people when they smiled like that.

There Alca rested in the Magni Inn until the next day.

They elected to travel to the designated spot once again. This time, Barakd was even following them by horse. Alca had left hers at the inn to ride with Magni.

“Why’re you coming?” Magni asked.

“To observe the progress. If it were me, I would likely have finished the bridge by now.”

“Is that a fact? Oh, I saw the cliff yesterday, and it seems like the gorge has

grown by about fifty percent. Think you could handle it even then?”

“Hrm, fifty percent... Surely he did not simply cause a collapse by hammering in too many stakes. In that case, it would be his responsibility.”

“From what I saw yesterday, it happened a lot longer ago than that.”

“Ahaha. If that is true, I will be a bit more generous with my judging.”

“Ohoho, you may use red-eyes, if you’d like.”

Red-eyes referred to the magic tool for seeing through lies. Magni telling the truth under their observation would be evidence enough.

“In any case, that can wait until I have seen the gorge for myself.”

“Sure. Ah, looks like we’re coming up o—”

The party arrived at the specified location. However, unlike yesterday... There was an excellent stone bridge crossing the gorge’s expanse.

“Wha?! Th-This can’t be...”

“Oh? Did I mistake the location?”

“Nope, this is the place, Barakd. But how in the world...? Is it an illusion?”

It was an ashen-gray bridge. It had not been there yesterday, but nonetheless it was wide enough for two carriages to cross past each other. It even had strong protective railings on either side for safety.

And in the middle of the bridge, a man in priest robes was humming to himself while attaching the skull of a Lesser Wyvern to the side of the railing. It was Narikin.

On closer inspection, the skull had a neat, round hole in the middle of it. Judging by the bones, that had been the fatal blow, and both Alca and Magni determined it had been killed yesterday.

Once the bone was attached, Narikin stopped working. “Oh? I thought for certain the deadline was tomorrow...”

“Narikin...? B-But, what...?” Alca stammered, her voice shaking as she spoke and got out of the carriage.

“The skull? It’s for warding off monsters. Consider it like a scarecrow. It seems to me that it was this guy that broke the last bridge... The guilty Wyvern, if you will.”

“I-I see. The guilty Wyvern... Ah, yes, erm, it certainly will be functional as a ward for monsters.”

As Narikin played dumb with a smile, it was all the High Priestess could do to smile back.

Narikin’s (Keima’s) Perspective

Man, that was rough. What was rough, exactly? The fact that Narikin took a wrong turn and we ended up having to take a huge detour around the entire mountain. We arrived past yesterday afternoon, and if not for Alca’s horse being so fast, we might not even have made it here in the first seven days.

But in any case, we got there safely. I had three days to pump the bridge out. That said, a very well-known god worked for six days and rested on the seventh, and I was similarly a believer in spending the last day one had to rest. I would accept no counterarguments.

Narikin was groveling in bird form apologetically, refusing to stand whatsoever, but I assured him there was no use crying over spilled milk as I possessed his body to get the job done. The horse was in the way, so I stuck him into {Storage}, then set the mana potion barrels into place and spammed {Stone Pyre} and {Create Golem} to get the bridge done. When possessing Narikin, he could use all the spells I could use. And since I was using them, I could use the modified chants and lack of chants the same way I did normally. He needed mana potions for this while I wouldn’t have, but that was just a necessary cost.

The gorge was a bit wider than I had been told, but I was just using {Stone Pyre} to make a long stretch of footing, so it was no problem at all. I also put in place a safety net in case anyone fell. Perfect! It was all safe.

Thus, I completed a bridge wide enough for a carriage to cross. That was yesterday afternoon. As you can imagine, the situation changed.

A child Wyvern flew from the sky and smashed the bridge. Luckily nobody was

hurt since nobody was at the bottom of the gorge, but... *Curse you, Wyvern, that was three hours of work!*

I realized he would keep destroying the bridge if I left him alive, so I blasted out an {Element Shot}. I could even use that while possessing someone as long as they had their basic magic spells.

Incidentally, I didn't want the Wyvern's parents coming for revenge, but apparently it was no child at all. Rokuko, who had at some point possessed Tran over Narikin, told me it was actually an adult Lesser Wyvern. *Thanks, but give Narikin his bird body back.*

Still, to think a Wyvern that small could destroy the bridge just by smashing into it. Making a bridge is harder than I thought. Let me try again and use {Stone Pyre} to form support pillars... Alright, done! Let's see how it holds up.

They wanted a bridge that could carry carriages and stuff. No doubt a platoon of Golems marching across it would be good enough. So I used rocks from the cliff to make Stone Golems, but... The bridge shattered once five of them were on it.

That sucks... Those Stone Golems were crazy heavy, so I'm not that surprised, but I think I want the bridge to at least be able to support several full wagons crossing it at once. It was the middle of the night. I recalled a bridge-building game I had seen once, and started building a truss support structure beneath the bridge. It was a highly resilient structure with a bunch of upside-down and normal triangles. Then I put a gentle arch supporting the center. That would dissipate the load and increase durability.

I worked late into the night, using {Light} to secure vision. Narikin's body was slow to tire to begin with, and if I kept chugging mana potions I could keep working hard. Monsters came midway through construction, but fled after seeing the Lesser Wyvern corpse. I decided to put its skull and magic stone on the bridge to stave off monsters when I was done.

And so, when morning came I was finally done. I sent out the five Golems that had crushed it before to see if it would survive.

Ooh, it has! I made it wider so two carriages could pass each other, so this should about do it. People could probably even do gymnastics here, honestly.

Let's see what happens when I have the Golems try it... Ah, they broke the road itself and fell down. Funny. I guess this truss structure did win every single map in the 2D game.

And so, I made the road itself thicker, and repaired the parts of the truss structure that had been smashed by the fallen Golems. It was a bit unreasonable to test it with Golems doing gymnastics, so instead I had six of them form a pyramid on it. The bridge proved more than strong enough to hold them, so I cleaned up the golems, the {Stone Pyres} I was using for footing, and the mana potion barrels.

Thus the bridge was completed, more or less. That was noon today. All I had left was attaching the Lesser Wyvern's magic stone and skull, so it was time for some dissection.

Just as I was digging the magic stone into the Lesser Wyvern's skull and fixing it on the bridge, I heard the clapping of horse hooves. I looked over and saw that for some reason the judges were here. And the High Priestess, too.

Why already? I thought it was the day after tomorrow... Or rather, since I just worked all night, it'd be tomorrow.

Anyway, I had been doing all this while possessing Narikin specifically for this kind of scenario, so it wasn't a problem.

"Oh? I thought for certain the deadline was tomorrow..."

"Narikin...? B-But, what...?" Alca stammered, her voice shaking as she got out of the wagon and headed this way. *What do you mean, what? I'm just building a bridge, obviously. Oh, wait, she must be talking about the skull.*

"The skull? It's for warding off monsters. Consider it like a scarecrow. It seems to me that it was this guy that broke the last bridge... The guilty Wyvern, if you will."

"I-I see. The guilty Wyvern... Ah, yes, erm, it certainly will be functional as a ward for monsters."

The High Priestess herself giving her approval, huh? That makes this a five-star bridge.

“No, boy, that’s not what she means... That is, you certainly can use monster corpses to ward off others, even farms do that, but the question is, how’d you build this bridge so fast?” the old lady Magni asked, stepping out of the small wagon, too.

“I don’t believe the instruction specified any specific form of bridge? Is there a problem, judge?”

“Not at all... It’s just such an excellent bridge, you see, Barakd is left speechless over there. Consider me just a bit curious,” Magni said, pointing. I looked over and saw that Barakd’s spirit had apparently left his body.

Magni continued. “After all, when I came to look yesterday, there was nothing but a gorge. Can’t say I blame anyone for being surprised at a bridge like this popping up overnight. Right, Alca?”

“I-Indeed. I arrived here three days ago, and have been waiting for you ever since, Narikin.”

What the? Sounds like Alca and Magni dropped by yesterday. I arrived after noon, so I must have just missed them. We didn’t even pass each other by since I came from the opposite side of the mountain. Makes sense. That’s why they think the bridge was built overnight... Because it was.

I had no choice but to double down.

“You may not know this, but I am known to some as Narikin the Construction Mage. I will keep the details short, but I pumped this bridge out with magic.”

“You... pumped it out? With magic?”

“Yes. With magic.”

I felt their gaze say, “Well, I suppose you certainly don’t look like a warrior.”

“Never heard of Construction magic. What’s it like?”

“As you can see, it does one thing or another, and then you have a bridge.”

“One thing or another. You sure got a lot of secrets, boy... I like it,” Magni cackled. “By the way, how’d you kill the Lesser Wyvern?”

Why’s this old lady curious about that? It’s gruesome.

“I’ll cut the details short, but I kinda just blasted it with magic when it got annoying.”

“Blasted it when it got annoying, hm...? Say, how about you become my husband? I want to raise your children.”

“Mother Magni?!” Alca exclaimed.

“It’s a joke, Alca. And anyway, boy, were you hiding your true self yesterday? You feel different today, on some kinda deep level.”

Oh crap, did she detect the difference between Narikin and I? Guess that’s an archpriest for you.

“I’m a bit shy, and yesterday was nerve wracking. Also, I spent all night building the bridge, so the sleep deprivation doesn’t help.”

“All night, hm? To think you really built this in one night... Impressive.” Magni gave an impressed look at the bridge. “Well, no point being suspicious when the bridge’s right here. Still, poor Alca here was waiting two whole days here for ya. How about you say something?”

“Two days? Erm... My apologies, High Priestess. Truthfully, I took the wrong road and ended up coming from the opposite side of the mountain.”

“Ah, no, worry not. I came without informing you, after all,” Alca said, visibly displeased even after I apologized. Nothing I could do here but try to butter her up and fix this. I owed her for the horse, and there were still two trials left.

“High Priestess. I do not know if this will suffice as an apology, but I grant you the right to be the first to travel across the bridge.

“Ah?! You would not mind?”

“Consider it an expression of gratitude for the horse as well. Fear not, it is quite durable.”

“I see, as thanks for the horse... V-Very well, I will accept,” Alca said, her grumpy frown twitching as she tried and failed to hide her happiness. I didn’t really care about crossing the bridge first, so yeah, perfect.

“I-In that case,” she continued, “may I ask for you to escort me?”

“Certainly, High Priestess,” I said, taking her outstretched hand and guiding her to the bridge.

“Stop! NOT ON MY WATCH!” came a barking shout. Barakd, failing to read the mood, rushed forward on his horse and crossed the bridge first. *What the hell? Did he really want to cross the bridge first that much?*

“Barakd! What’s wrong you?!” Magni shouted.

“Hmph! They wanted to emulate the god-bridge, but I will not let that happen!”

Uh, what? The god-bridge? Let me just ask Narikin what that means. Good thing I kept him in my pocket.

“(Fwah! E-Excuse me, I was asleep! My sincerest apologies. The alluring spell of sleep was too strong to resist. So... Is the bridge complete?)”

“(Yep. You were asleep, huh? Well... Can’t blame you. Anyway, what’s the god-bridge in Church of Light lore?)”

“(The god-bridge? I believe it’s one of the Church of Light’s fables. A man led a war charge on his horse to win a battle and save his wife. But unfortunately, an earthquake split the earth apart. The God of Light then formed a bridge between the chasm, giving him the choice to either go fight the battle with his wife, or flee alongside her. There was no right answer, and both are seen as correct. It is a fable that questions how a married couple will choose to live together.)”

A fable about married couples?! Holy crap, I almost just locked myself in as being Alca’s husband! I couldn’t even back out of it, the parallels are too strong!

“M-My apologies, High Priestess! I was not considering the parable, and in my sleep-deprived state offended you at the mere proposition of performing it! Aah, Father Barakd, thank you for stopping it!” I bowed my head deeply to Barakd, expressing the most sincere gratitude I could. I was impressed that Narikin remembered that, too. *Thanks, I was one step away from disaster.*

“Oho? You sure are forgiving, boy. I like that. Barakd, meanwhile? Can’t say I’m impressed,” Magni said.

“Ngh, ngggh! I-I didn’t want them falling off. The god-bridge can only be crossed once.”

“Anyway, the bridge didn’t budge from your racing across it. Seems plenty wide for two carriages as well. Barakd, he won the first trial, and I doubt you’ll protest that. I’ll cross it, too, if you want. If only we brought two wagons, hm?”

“I-It does seem like a clear victory here...”

“Two out of three judges give you a passing grade, so that’s that. Good job, boy. Though not even Ragil could give a bridge like this a failing grade.”

And so, Magni crossed the bridge back and forth with her small wagon, and with that the first trial was complete.

Alca was a bit peeved and pouty on the way back to Mastermind, but, well, it is what it is.

Ragil’s Perspective

Back within Mastermind, the head of the pope faction, Archpriest Ragil, was waiting for Barakd in his estate’s office.

Barakd had sped past the slowly moving wagon of Narikin’s group and returned to Mastermind first. He raced directly into Ragil’s estate, and was in the process of cleaning himself up.

“If you’ll excuse me, Father Ragil, I will begin,” Barakd said, coming to the office to give his report once he was well dressed. However, the bitter expression on his face made it clear to Ragil that Narikin had successfully completed the first trial.

“Oh? The boy successfully completed the bridge in a single week, you say? It seems he has something of a head on his shoulders,” Ragil said.

“Erm... Indeed, Father Ragil.”

“Hrm? Why the pause? Constructing a bridge would be trivial to one with knowledge of active warfare. A mere log with wooden planks atop it would suffice. Once the planks are in place, one can simply reinforce them and cover them with our local black cloth to complete it as a construction. That is the ideal

solution to this puzzle.”

“Why, it was so simple... Hence why you advised me to go observe, I suppose.”

Indeed. It was often the case that a military would need to cross gorges when marching, and armies had wagons full of goods. If one knew their methods, this trial would be impossibly simple. Though the High Priestess hadn’t known that, since she only fought alone.

“Do not tell me you suggested this trial simply because you did not realize there was such an obvious method?” Ragil said.

“O-Of course not! I did know, of course. However, erm, I did not consider how black cloth could be used to simplify the process.”

“Hah! I will leave it at that. So, what manner of bridge did the boy build?”

“About that, Father Ragil.” Barakd faltered.

“Hrm? What is it, Barakd?”

“Erm, as far as I could tell... He built a stone bridge,” Barakd said. And it had been far too well constructed to have been built in a single week. Which was bad enough on its own, but according to Alca and Magni, he actually did it in a single day.

“What, a stone bridge? Do you mean to say he predicted he would be assigned this trial specifically and prepared ahead of time?” Ragil inquired.

“Ahead of time? No, we have Mother Magni and the High Priestess’s word that he finished it overnight.”

“Fool. There are many misleading phrases one could use there. It is a bluff. One man, building a bridge wide enough for two wagons, overnight? That would be the very definition of a miracle. Clearly, they were strategizing to accomplish the final trial this way.”

“Ah! I see, Magni has already been conquered by that medpriest.”

Indeed, building bridges as Barakd suggested would normally be a heroic feat that took much manpower. They facilitated trade and could enrich entire regions. For one man to build that bridge in one night? Preposterous. They

were no doubt aiming to establish grounds for the third trial's miracle.

That said, the gorge in question did not need such an elaborate bridge. It was convenient to have one, for certain, but there were detours, and any bridge was doomed to be destroyed by a fast-fleeing Lesser Wyvern so obnoxious it had been given the name Bridge-Killer. Elaborate bridges would not be worth the investment whatsoever.

"Oh, but that said, he did attach the skull of a Lesser Wyvern to the side of the bridge," Barakd said.

"Truly? Hm, I see. That must mean the High Priestess aided him and slew the Bridge-Killer for his sake. Hence his having the opportunity to build the bridge. Curse that Magni... No doubt she was smirking on the inside when we suggested building a bridge on the Dreadcliff Gorge. It is like we walked into a trap of our own volition."

That was the obvious conclusion, really, to a normal train of thought. Barakd nodded; after some thought, he, too, felt that he had been completely fooled somehow.

"Still, the work he must have put into the groundwork is as thorough as one would want from an archpriest. Perhaps it would be better to make him an ally?" Barakd suggested.

"Quite. Narikin seems to have a good head on his shoulders. In which case, the next trial will be the last, in practice. We can probe him before then."

If they could lock him into the pope faction, then Ragil would not mind accepting the rapid building of the bridge as a miracle.

"It is a bold miracle, to be sure. I am a bit jealous, as all I could do was use appearing and disappearing trick boxes. Oh yes... He did say something about construction magic."

"Construction magic? I have not heard of it... Though he was supposedly a traveling priest in the empire. I will consult those more informed on imperial matters."

Narikin's Perspective

“I am back,” Narikin said upon Keima returning his body. He was welcomed by Rokufa and Toi.

“Welcome back, my lord. I will take your coat,” Toi said.

“That took a long time. It’s been over a week,” Rokufa said.

“What can I say? Master finished the bridge in time, so that is all that matters. Not that there was ever any doubt that he would.”

Keima had once again done everything himself, with Narikin’s contributions amounting to getting lost and wasting his time. He also took care of the High Priestess on the road back from Dreadcliff Gorge, but that might as well have just been him making up for his mistake to begin with. If he had arrived without getting lost, they could have returned to Mastermind before the week was even up.

“Speaking of which, I remembered this only after you left, but Lady Leona once instructed me on how to use logs to form an efficient bridge known as the Da Vinci bridge or some such.”

“Oh? Is that a fact? How does it work, exactly?”

“I shall teach you. Toi taught me earlier,” Rokufa said, puffing out her chest and taking out some wooden sticks shaped like logs. She swiftly built a bridge out of them, surprising Narikin.

From there they casually passed the time, until some knocks came at the door.

“Hm? Who is it?”

“I have a delivery for Narikin,” came a voice.

Narikin blinked. He didn’t remember asking for anything to be delivered.

“I shall handle this. Judging by the voice, I believe it is Hugo,” Toi said, and upon opening the door, there was indeed Hugo on the other side. For some reason, he was striking a pose that showed off his muscles, and despite not having entered the room yet, it felt as if the humidity had risen.

“Well well, thank you for coming, Hugo. You have a delivery? I will accept it.”

“I was told to deliver it directly. Out of the way, damned pup... Heya, mama! I came to play and deliver the... Hmm?” Hugo rejoiced at the sight of Narikin behind Toi, but swiftly narrowed his eyes at him. “...Hey, pup. That’s not mama. Who is it? A body double?”

“Oh my, you can tell?”

“Fuck you for doubting it. Mama and I are bound by soul, I wouldn’t mistake her for anyone.”

Toi reevaluated her opinion of Hugo, not knowing how competent he was when Keima wasn’t around. However, seeing that he refused to deliver the letter until... mama... was here, she elected to request an emergency possession from Keima.

* * *

I revived Mr. Possess immediately and possessed Narikin, only to find Hugo had arrived. Yeah, okay, that was certainly an emergency situation.

“So, what are you here for?”

“Mama! I have a letter from Archpriest Ragil to you. Here!”

I took the folded letter from Hugo. His energetic child act was as tiring as ever.

“What, did you start a part-time job as a mailman?” I asked.

“Nah, actually, the idea is to intimidate you by having the assassin that killed Santaku give the letter. So take a good look at me, mama! And here, the letter.”

What the hell, a newbie-torturing delivery? Whatever, I’ll just read the letter.

“Let’s see here... *Ye who would succeed Santaku. Before you are two paths. One is the path wherein you serve us and live. The other is where you follow Santaku on the long journey to the Country of Light.*”

So basically, join us or die. A choice but not a choice.

“Oh, there’s another page. Reading on... *Your teacher foolishly attempted to betray us out of greed, and was cut down by the one you see before you. Do not forget that fact.* Yeah, okay. Hugo, will you kill me if I turn down the offer?”

“They told me to, but I won’t!”

“I figured.”

Unfortunately for them, Hugo was on my side, so this threatening message was not particularly threatening at all.

Still, they say Santaku betrayed them, huh? That would make Santaku a spy for the pope faction that had infiltrated the reform faction. Though... Wait, a third letter.

“A postscript... *If you listen to what we say, I will tell you the answer to the next trial. Prepare yourself for kissing feet.* Hugo, did you hear anything about the next trial?”

“Hm? Uh-huh, I eavesdropped by the door after leaving, and they said they were gonna make you talk about your teacher’s research.”

“Wowee, you sure are skilled, Hugo. I’m glad you’re on our side. Next up, look into what that research was about.”

“Eheheh, I got a compliment! Okay, I’ll go investigate!”

Also, kissing feet is a ceremony for swearing obedience, as I recall. I remember Alca talking about it.

“Alright, how to answer this... I’d like to keep Ragil thinking you’re on his side, Hugo, but I’m not into kissing male feet.”

“If I don’t kill you, they’ll figure us out, and if we act like you fought me back, it’d be weird that you spared me. This is tough... Maybe I should just go and kill Ragil instead?”

“Could you do that?”

“Easy! He trusts me a bit ’cause I killed Santaku. Want me to do it? Anything you tell me to do is a good deed, mama!” Hugo said with a toothy smile.

“Ehhh, nah. Don’t worry about it. He’s a highly important judge for me right now, after all. For now, just go tell him I asked for time to think while shaking in my boots. That should buy some time.”

“You’d be super cute if you shook in fear, mama. Okay!”

Technically speaking, I did have the High Priestess backing me up here, so it would be more strange if I just accepted immediately.

“Ah, mama. They told me to destroy the letter after I read it to rid of the evidence.”

“Makes sense. Could you write ‘the letter I got from Ragil’ on this?”

“Uh-huh!”

Hugo carved the words onto a wooden board for ye olde medieval writing.

“Hand it over.”

“Kay.”

“Alright, I got the letter. And this sure has ‘the letter I got from Ragil’ on it. You can have it back, do whatever you want.”

“Kaaay. Now I can say I destroyed the letter I got from Ragil! Very clever, mama!”

That’s the idea. Glad he was quick on the uptake.

I put the letter away into {Storage}. I would probably not use it, but you know, always good to have blackmail.

“By the way, mama. I kinda want a gift for doing all these things for you,” Hugo said, poking his head this way and glancing at me.

...Alright, alright, I’ll rub your head. Fine. Rub rub.

“(Ahaha, look, Rokufa. That monster of a man is acting like a baby.)”

“That man identified the difference between Narikin and Master in a moment... Although he did not seem to be able to tell Rokuko and me apart. Though surely that is just because he does not care.”

“Just imagine hiring an assassin so thoroughly trained into submission by someone else. I feel sympathy for the other side,” Toi said, casually watching on with Tran (Narikin) and Rokufa.

It’s kind of the idea that he’s role-playing as a baby, but yeah. Let’s not think too hard about it.

Ragil's Perspective

It became time to give Medpriest Narikin his second trial.

Ragil was performing the duty himself in the church's chapel. The pope would not be visiting this time. He would oversee the third trial, but if Narikin failed the second trial, that would be the end of the pope's involvement.

"Father Ragil, the weather is simply wonderful today, no?"

"Oho, Barakd. Indeed it is. The God of Light's rays truly do shine down upon us."

Before the second trial was given, Ragil was meeting Barakd, a fellow archpriest of the pope faction.

"Incidentally, Father Ragil. Did you probe Narikin to see if he will join our faction?"

"Indeed. However, it seems that simply sending a messenger has left him deathly frightened."

"And the fact I have not heard of him fleeing must mean...?"

"He has not given an answer, but today's trial may nonetheless be as we discussed ahead of time."

That being a trial to prove that he truly was Santaku's disciple. They would demand a presentation on something Santaku had been researching. Even Archpriest Magni, who was supposed to be the High Priestess, concurred that this trial was agreeable—if Narikin was his direct disciple, then surely he had heard some of his research.

However. "Santaku's research" was in fact a massive trap hole.

Truthfully, Santaku had done no research at all, and his reports existed in name only. Why did Ragil know that when Santaku was supposedly of the opposing faction? Because Santaku was in fact a spy sent from the pope faction.

Santaku had received intelligence and funding from the reform faction for his research as part of his mission to weaken the reform faction from the inside out.

The research documents he produced had been prepared by Ragil, and despite being about an impossibility, the reform faction had been duped like fools. The fact that Santaku had secured a high status in the faction using the money they gave him was endlessly amusing to Ragil.

In any case, Santaku ultimately elected to use the funds he saved up to rebel against the pope faction, but before then he had been Ragil's loyal dog. Naturally, Ragil had his research documents. The base manuscripts, which even Santaku had only been shown portions of, were still with him.

If Narikin joined the pope faction, he would ask only what Santaku knew, and if he did not, he needed only to ask about the more complex portions.

"Still, to think that Santaku had a direct disciple. I never would have guessed," Barakd mused.

"Indeed, I never heard of him myself. And Santaku was so useful precisely because he was poor at hiding things... If this Narikin truly is his disciple, he must have been quite the actor."

"Still suspicious then, Father Ragil?"

"I have evidence: the gold Santaku acquired the day of his death. If we assume that boy bought his status as Santaku's disciple, it would all come together."

And if that were the case, it was highly possible he wouldn't even know that Santaku's research existed in the first place. That would mean he wouldn't be able to give answers at all, including about the stuff Santaku knew.

Just who in the world was Narikin? That, too, may be one mystery they solved today at the trial.

Narikin's (Keima's) Perspective

Light rained into the chapel from the stained glass windows. It seemed the trial would be held here today.

According to Hugo, they would be questioning me on Santaku's research results. Which in turn meant one would need to demonstrate the results

themselves. And I sure would do that myself. After all, there would be holes in my cover story if I didn't prepare ahead of time. Thus, I went ahead and possessed Narikin. Judging by the research Hugo had told us about, this would be a bit much for Hugo to handle on his own.

However, since I didn't want to be tripped up by any religious euphemisms, I had Tran (Narikin) in my chest pocket.

The three judges and Alca were already gathered and waiting in the chapel. There were lined-up pews facing the altar, and I walked down the red carpet between them to approach.

"Now then, Medpriest Narikin. I shall hereby present your second trial."

"Yes, father!" I declared, kneeling.

Archpriest Ragil spread open a piece of parchment. "We shall hereby question you on Santaku's research. Not at a future date, but at this very moment. We believe you will naturally understand your teacher's research, if you are truly his disciple."

"As you wish," I intoned, accepting the parchment and looking it over. It seemed to be the exact same thing he had just said, with no tricks. I stood at the podium as if it was a teacher's podium, and the judges sat in their seats to begin the questioning.

"To start... What was the subject of Santaku's research?" Barakd began.

"...Perpetual motion," I answered. Indeed, perpetual motion. The phenomenon which might as well have been called one of humanity's ultimate dreams. Friggin' Santaku, he sure was chasing the stars with his research. Or not, really; Hugo had only been able to learn the barest basics of the research, which probably indicated only the barest basics existed. Santaku had apparently been gathering money under the guise of researching perpetual motion.

"The power of dreams, unreliable on rain or wind. I believe Santaku once said that if perpetual motion was achieved, war would fade into nothing, and so, too, would dungeons," Barakd continued. Incidentally, he had gathered money with the very lazily constructed position that investment was needed for the future, and also that it would probably help conquer dungeons somehow. It was

pretty funny that by saying it would take until the next generation, he was guaranteeing ahead of time that he couldn't do it himself. If I failed to become the next generation in question, I would use that phrasing myself. Thank you, teacher.

"How nostalgic. He said those words to me when asking for donations, you know. Though I didn't pay," Magni said.

"I personally donated around fifty golds or so, Mother Magni," Alca replied proudly. *Alcaaaa, you were duped.*

That said, even in 21st-century Japan, there were still some people falling for the perpetual motion machine trick. Even though physics proved perpetual motion to be impossible back in like the eighteenth century or so, we as a species still just find the idea of it endlessly appealing.

"That was just the beginning. We will now ask questions to see how much you truly know, Medpriest Narikin," Ragil said.

"Quite. Even I know that much," Barakd said with a smile. *Yeah, and that was all Hugo managed to learn himself. That's why I'm here.*

"Perpetual motion. Care to explain what that entails, exactly?" Ragil asked.

"It would be a bit hard to explain through words," I said.

"Oho! Do you intend to evade the question with turns of phrase? If so, this is not a trial you will be—"

"Fortunately, I have a model in my {Storage} which I will now use to explain," I said, interrupting Ragil and taking out a twelve-sided box. In the center of the dodecagon was an axis, such that one could spin the whole thing around it like a lottery machine one might find in a market street. There were twelve sections within the machine, each with balls inside. On top of that, the axis was connected to small mortars with gears, such that turning the axis moved them.

"Wha? A-A model? I-I see, a model, hm," Ragil said, stunned. *Sorry, but I had enough prep time to make this. In like two hours.*

"Oho, not bad. Turning the boxes turns the mortars. Easy to understand at a glance. Seems like a waterwheel?" Magni asked.

“You are correct, Mother Magni.”

I touched the boxes and spun them experimentally, causing the balls within to clink around while the mortar began pumping.

“Just like a waterwheel, and just like a windmill, this box’s job is to spin. If this were the real thing, the grain inside would be getting milled as we speak,” I explained. Alca and Barakd stood up to approach the model.

“Narikin, this is my first time seeing a model with so many moving parts!” Alca exclaimed.

“Allow me to see as well... Oho, every part plays such a clear function! This is quite the model!” Barakd exclaimed as well. They were both having the time of their lives here.

You sure you should be over here, Barakd? Ragil looks pissed at you.

“Ahem! Attention, I would like to continue my questioning of Medpriest Narikin, if I may,” Ragil coughed, trying to get things back in order.

“What, Ragil? Isn’t this enough? Santaku never showed us anything like this,” Magni said.

“Not at all! The principles. Narikin, you must explain the principles upon which perpetual motion is founded. Can you do it?”

“Yes, father. Allow me to use the model to explain,” I replied, gripping the triangle formed from the center axis to the edge of one box and opening the top to reveal the inside. Naturally it had a lid; I made it specifically for explanation purposes.

“We can see inside?! I see the source of the sounds are these balls,” Alca observed.

“Indeed. Furthermore, there are bumps and ridges within each triangular section that determine where these balls can move,” I explained. “But now for the principles. There is a law of reality wherein holding the same thing above your head and close to the bottom feels different in weight. Perpetual motion uses this principle to function,” I said. When on the right side, a ball would roll down the smooth surface to the outside, away from the central axis. When on

the left side, the bumpy insides of the section drive the ball to the center. “Can you see how despite the left and right being of the same height, the balls have different weights?”

“They certainly do,” Alca said with a nod.

“This wheel spins, with its right side being heavier. The balls then move in another area, making the right side heavier again. This continues, forever and ever. This is one principle of perpetual motion; the unbalanced wheel, as it’s called.”

“One?! Just one?!” Ragil exclaimed, jumping out of his seat.

“Indeed. There are several others, but I was entrusted with the details of this wheel alone. I designed this model on the theory I was given. And I believe this is enough to explain the principle of perpetual motion, no, Archpriest Ragil?” I asked. My explanation already had Alca and Magni gazing upon the model with sparkling eyes. Even Barakd looked highly interested in it.

“Father Narikin, does this truly work?!” Alca exclaimed. “Ah, we must summon a crowd to the church, and announce these results officially posthaste!”

“Agreed,” Magni said. “Judging by the sound, you went ahead and made each section precisely, no? Boy, go ahead and spin it. It should work based on your explanation.”

The two of them pushed me on.

“Er... Yes, indeed. Surely it would work, based on the principles you just explained,” Ragil said. And indeed, it would work according to those principles. But when I shut the lid and spun the box, it did so just a bit with inertia, then stopped abruptly.

The energy from the balls on the left matched the energy of the balls trying to drop to the right, ending the motion swiftly. It was simple science. If this design actually did spin forever, there would be no need for there to be any hamster wheels anywhere else. A ball bearing would have been the only mortar one needed. They could be mortars with electricity, but anyway.

“It is as you see.”

“In short, it doesn’t work?” Magni asked.

“Indeed. However, I believe it conveyed the principles nonetheless?” I asked.

Ragil furrowed his brows. “Do explain yourself.”

“A model this simple could be built with a gold or less. There would be no reason not to test it. This is just my theory, but I believe that Father Santaku never showed such models to the High Priestess and others who so graciously donated their money so as to not disappoint them when they failed to work in practice. He was being considerate,” I said. In the sense that if he disappointed his sponsors, they would stop giving him money.

“I see, I see... So Santaku’s research was to make this machine actually function,” Magni said.

“It would be truly wondrous if it did,” Alca said.

“Goodness gracious, even I was quite surprised,” Barakd said. “Perhaps I should donate to Narikin’s research myself one day.”

Uh, what? Aren’t you part of the pope faction, Barakd? Why are you getting tricked?

“Hmph, but if it does not work, it might as well be Papala’s greatsword. You are saying that Santaku’s research was all useless,” Ragil said.

“Ragil, that’s the wrong way to look at it,” Magni said. “The boy’s proven he was Santaku’s disciple, no? I’d say he passed the second trial with this.”

“F-Father Ragil, what do you think?” Barakd asked with hesitation.

Ragil fell silent, massaging his brows with his fingers.

He sure is being stubborn, huh...? Well, guess I can’t blame him. After all, the pope faction knows that Santaku was a fraud and didn’t do any research at all. Guess I’ll just need to overturn that fact, too.

“I would not say his research was entirely useless. This model does function in the proper conditions,” I said.

“C-Come again?!” Ragil exclaimed.

Indeed. If they thought Santaku was a fraud, I just had to make them believe

he had done actual research and had in fact progressed further than the research the pope faction had for themselves. They knew perpetual motion machines were fake, so everything I said from this point on were things they didn't know about.

"Truthfully, this model functions within dungeons," I continued.

Under normal circumstances, perpetual motion machines did not function. If they did, there was probably a hamster inside turning the wheel. And of course, the hamster in this case is a Golem I made with {Create Golem}. Inside a dungeon, it could be supplied with mana and continue to function forever. Thus, I set it to move only when inside a dungeon.

Surely the Golem would only work inside of my own dungeon, you say? Nah, I'm making the Golems with my magic, and they aren't directly connected to any dungeon. This works because they just absorb mana around them on their own. That's how they live.

In fact, being able to absorb energy from the environment and turn it into your own energy to move forever was known as the second principle of perpetual motion. That made Golems actual perpetual motion machines! Though that logic is actually dumb, since it's like saying that borrowing an outlet in a restaurant made your phone a perpetual motion machine. It just stole mana instead of electricity.

Anyway, that was a detour. Luckily, everyone was frozen in shock from the revelation that the machine actually worked, so I took the opportunity to repeat myself for dramatic emphasis.

"This model does in fact work within a dungeon."

"I-It does, boy?! Isn't that incredible?!" Magni asked.

"It moves? It truly moves?! I wish to see it, Narikin!" Alca exclaimed.

"Th-This can't be! Father Ragil?!"

"Calm down, calm down! I-I refuse to believe it until I see it in practice!"

Hm. Yeah, that made sense. Who wouldn't want to see it?

"High Priestess. May you take us to the nearest dungeons?" I asked, lifting the

model.

“Of course! Let us go now, right away! Come now, everyone, stand!”

“I’m looking forward to this myself,” Barakd said. “The nearest dungeon is... The [Majimanji Horse Labyrinth] that is one week away by carriage?”

“No, wait. There’s an artificial dungeon beneath the church, no?”

“Magni! That is not to be known by a medpriest! Even few archpriests know that!” Ragil barked, but Magni shook her head.

“Relax, Ragil. He might as well be an archpriest already; besides, I heard he’s a specialty priest. Isn’t that right, Alca?”

“Indeed. I assigned him the role and instructed him myself. Thus, he knows of the artificial dungeon already.”

“This is news to me,” Barakd said. It seemed he was the only one out of all of us who didn’t know about it.

And so, we went to the artificial dungeon beneath the church. That said, there was no need to go all the way to the artificial dungeon production facility; the hallway already counted as part of the dungeon.

“I had been wondering what was behind this door... Oho, this is one beautiful underground passage,” Barakd said.

“It also serves as an escape route if need be. Don’t be using it every day now. But in any case... Boy, this part of the hallway should already be part of the dungeon. Let me see the model.”

“Here you are, Mother Magni,” I said, handing over the model. She first double-checked that it didn’t work outside of the dungeon’s territory. The old crone was cautious.

Then, she stuck it into the artificial dungeon’s territory and spun the twelve boxes. The connected mortar began to slowly go up and down.

“It works, as you can see. And inside an artificial dungeon, as well... I do believe this is a new discovery,” I said, to which Barakd clapped.

“Wonderful! Absolutely wonderful, Father Narikin! I’m simply moved!”

“Father Narikin... Aaah, my heart is pounding so hard it aches! I have not felt so moved since the day you saved my life!” Alca cried.

O High Priestess, I do believe you refer to Keima there, who is someone else entirely.

“Th-There must be some trick to this,” Ragil said.

“Of course there is, Father Ragil. I just explained it to you moments ago.”

“Then why does it work only within dungeons?!”

“I plan to identify and prove that with further research,” I said, and there was nothing more he could say to that. After all, the trial was to prove that I had inherited Santaku’s research, not explain on the spot how a mysterious phenomenon still under research functioned.

“Boy, what’s the name of this device? It’s not quite a perpetual motion machine. Doesn’t it need another name?” Magni asked.

“Hm... True. Things which run on water are called water-powered, while things which run on wind are called wind-powered. Since this runs on dungeon power, perhaps we could call it a dungeon-powered machine?”

“I suppose we could hardly call it something else.”

“Wait a moment, that will make it sound like natural blessings are the blessings of dungeons. I say we take Father Narikin’s name and call them Narikin machines!” Barakd exclaimed.

“Uh.”

“Well, well, Barakd. Who knew you had a good naming sense? Narikin machines it is. The God of Light will surely rejoice if we say we are stealing the power of dungeons to make it work,” Magni said before I could refuse. *Wait, it’s set in stone now?*

“Now your name is carved into this history-changing invention forever! Ohoho, what a happy ending.”

Er, Barakd? If looks could kill, you’d be dead right now, at Ragil’s hands. Are you sure you should be saying all this?

“Erm, all that said, I am still researching this. I still do not know why it works in dungeons, so...”

“Boy, could you make one of these models for me? No need for the mortar, and the top doesn’t have to come off either. And make it as small as possible. I’d donate a hundred golds for this,” Magni said.

“Oh, and I would wish for one as well! As the father who named them! Hopefully five golds will suffice?”

“Um, Narikin. I wish for one as well...! I will donate as much as you ask!” Alca said.

All three of them were begging hard for one. But, well, even if I couldn’t mass produce them, it would be strange if I couldn’t make a few more to show that my research was recreatable.

“Just this one. Oh, do you want one as well, Father Ragil?”

“...I will take one. Will thirty golds suffice?”

Wait, he actually wants one? That’s surprising.

In any case, I passed the second trial with votes from everyone. Now the last one was showing a miracle. It was tough to decide on which to show. Though before that, I had to make four of these Narikin machines. *Sigh.*

* * *

Anyway, I completed the tiny, palm-sized Narikin machines that would spin endlessly within dungeons. I brought them to the church and handed them to a receptionist for her to deliver them and in return received 155 golds. That paid back all I had spent to take the exam in the first place.

I made it so they’d stop working when taken apart, so there was no need to worry about them checking how they worked. Though I doubted they would.

In any case, it was finally time for the final trial.

The objective of this trial was to stand before the pope and show a miracle. I spent a lot of time thinking about what kind of trick, or rather, miracle, to show, but in the end I decided to stick to mind-reading like I imagined one of Santaku’s disciples would. This was the safest option. Considering I might want

to ad-lib with magic, I was possessing Narikin again for this.

“I’m coming, too! Darling!” Rokufa-ko said, full of hype. Apparently for the final trial, the judge and judged could invite an audience. It was in place so as many people as possible would see the miracle, while also putting emphasis on factions... Probably. I decided to bring Toi and the birdcage along, because why not.

Upon arriving at the church, a receptionist stepped aside to take me where I needed to go.

The room in question had a small stage in the center, surrounded by chairs. Near the table were especially tall seats. The front three were probably for the judges, while the tallest seat behind them was for the pope. It definitely felt like a special place.

“Please wait here. Everyone else will be here soon.”

“Understood.”

“And we can watch nearby?” Rokufa-ko asked, sitting with Toi in the front-row seats behind the table. Directly behind me, that is.

After some waiting, people began to trickle in. They had on priest robes, but I hadn’t seen any of them before. Though I didn’t know most of the priests here in the first place.

Oh, the High Priestess.

“Welcome, High Priestess. Thanks to your help, I have made it to the final trial,” I intoned.

“Narikin, thank you for delivering your wondrous gift to me the other day. Still, to think they would select this as the trial room. They must be planning to bring quite a few people,” Alca said. Apparently they invited people ahead of time, and selected the location based on that.

“The pope faction, I presume?”

“I, too, invited the reform faction. And I believe Mother Magni invited the moderate faction as well. The three main factions of the Church of Light will all be gathering today,” Alca said, sitting directly beside me.

...And I was going to demonstrate Santaku's dumb magic trick, out of respect for him, to all those people? I was starting to think I should probably change my plan.

When the time came, the three judges arrived. Magni, Ragil, and Barakd sat in the front three seats.

"We will now conduct Medpriest Narikin's final trial. But first... The pope enters," Magni declared, and I knelt upon the stage. The veiled pope entered, and sat in the tallest chair in front of the stage at the back. Magni continued leading the event.

"Thank you for coming, on this blessed day warmed by the God of Light's gentle rays. Today we will give Narikin, the archpriest candidate, his final trial. He splendidly passed the first and second, arriving before you here today. Now then... Medpriest Narikin. As for your final trial," she began, only to be interrupted.

"No," came a voice, echoing throughout the quiet hall.

It wasn't Ragil. Nor was it Barakd.

"Your Holiness. What do you mean...?"

"Did you not hear me, Magni? I said no. I object," the pope said. He was indeed objecting to this trial. As the crowd stirred, the pope took out a gavel from {Storage} and slammed it against his desk. The room quieted once more.

"Narikin is henceforth on trial on suspicion of being a heretic," the pope declared.

Uh-oh. I had no idea where this was coming from. The pope's sudden declaration morphed the magic show into an inquisition's court in a moment.

Though, wait, actually, this entire place feels like a courtroom now. Don't tell me he planned this from the start?

"Fortunately, many archpriests from across the land have been gathered here today and fulfill the requirements of an inquisition. All the pieces are in place," the pope said.

"Your Holiness? What's the meaning of all this?" I asked.

“It is a mere inquisition. If you are innocent, then there is no problem at all... Have him handcuffed!” the pope declared, and with that several soldiers wearing cloth armor entered. There was no point starting a fight here. I allowed myself to be clasped in metal handcuffs.

“Your Holiness! You would truly accuse Narikin of being a heretic?!” Alca cried, standing up and looking at the pope.

“Indeed, High Priestess Alca. This man is under suspicion of doing business with demons.”

“Demons?!?”

The pope nodded gravely. Demons? Our town had a lot of Succubi, but demons...? Oh, wait a second. Demons to the Church of Light were apostles of the God of Darkness, *i.e.* Dungeon Cores. And Core 564 was like a demon in a way one couldn’t even lie about.

...Oh crap. I might not be able to wiggle my way out of this. Sorry, Narikin. If you get executed here, I’ll revive you later.

“(Wait, wait, wait, what are we going to do about this?!?)”

Whoa, a voice right in my head... Rokufa-ko, huh?

“(Don’t do anything crazy. I’ll try to wiggle out of this, but if I can’t, the worst that’s coming is an execution.)”

“(An execution?! That’s awful, though!)”

“(I can just revive him with DP. You can go on home already if you want, Rokuko.)”

“(Oh, right. Rokufa and Narikin are our monsters.)”

Her (mental) voice brightened instantly. It’d be several magnitudes more expensive than reviving the spiders, but I could charge Haku for her costs. I had my payment from Daide, so I wasn’t worried either way.

“First was your initial trial. I saw the reports. In just one day, you seem to have built quite a splendid stone bridge. Is that correct, Alca?”

“Indeed, I was surprised to see it as well. What of it?” the High Priestess said.

The pope nodded gravely. “I was so curious about it that I sent a familiar to see it for myself. It was quite something indeed. I imagine no archpriest here could have built a bridge on that level in just a single night... Narikin. Did you not make a deal with a demon to summon the bridge?” the pope asked, looking at me through the veil.

“Objection! I did n—” I began only to be interrupted.

“You may remain silent for now. I will listen to your excuses in full when I am finished,” the pope said. “Moving on. The second trial. You displayed knowledge that not even Ragil knew, no? You say you are Santaku’s disciple, but... Despite how it may feel to hear this, you far surpass Santaku in every way. And indeed, your knowledge is so vast as to be suspicious. Where did you learn what you know? And these Narikin machines... They work only in the territory of demons. Did you receive them, too, from a demon?”

“Objection! I did n—”

“Again, remain silent. You may spend this time thinking of your excuses. In any case... This man is unfathomably knowledgeable and skilled. Too much so. He surpasses what would define one as human... Do you not all find this suspicious? Why would such a skilled man be unknown until now?”

“Is it not because Narikin was a traveling priest, dispatched to the empire?” Alca said again.

“First and foremost, that history is a lie, Alca. We have no records of a traveling priest named Narikin, not even when searching through decades of history. Boy... Were you involved in Santaku’s death, perchance? After all, you came to this holy ground of Mastermind immediately after he passed away. You purchased your status from Santaku, then had him eliminated—Am I wrong?”

“Objection! I—”

“Silence, ye who beds with demons. You are not permitted to speak.”

I got the feeling that at this rate, it would end with me not being allowed to speak at all.

“Wait a moment, your holiness! That is simply too cruel! Teachers and disciples are like family!” Alca exclaimed.

“Young Alca, as I said, he purchased his status. It was all a lie.”

“But... He passed the second trial, and everyone accepted him as Father Santaku’s disciple!” she continued, looking at the three judges sitting in taller seats.

“Well, we learned he was competent, at least. I thought it wouldn’t matter whether he was his disciple or not if he was that skilled, but... If it was all thanks to the power of demons, that changes things,” Magni said.

“I never stopped doubting,” Ragil said. “We were of different factions, but I viewed Santaku as a rival, and we were close in heart. Yet, he never spoke Narikin’s name a single time. The trial was regarding Santaku’s research, and I was forced to grant him a passing grade in that respect, but that is all. If what the pope speaks of is true, then it all makes sense.”

“I-I... have the same opinion as Father Ragil.”

So it was.

“A-And if it is not true... Then you will all apologize to Narikin, correct?!” Alca said to the three of them. *Er, it is all true, so maybe I’ll be the one apologizing to them?*

“In any case, I shall now hear your defense. But first,” the pope said, making a signal. A magic tool with a red jewel on it was brought in. “This is known as the Red Eye. If you lie, it will shine bright red for all to see.”

A lie detector, huh? I’ve seen something like this before. Though... If it is like that other one, they could manipulate it as much as they want. The pope could just make it shine red regardless of what I said. Forget an inquisition, this is going to be a witch trial.

“This is my first time seeing this tool. May I test it for a moment?”

“Test it...? Very well, speak as you like,” the pope said, and with his permission I spoke to the Red Eye.

“I am Narikin. I have a daughter, and that daughter likes to eat socks,” I said. The Red Eye didn’t shine. *Wow, it didn’t shine to Narikin, or me having a daughter, or the socks.*

“...Erm, Narikin?” Alca asked. “You having a daughter is one thing, but she likes to eat socks? That Red Eye must be broken. We need to exchange it at once.”

“True, unless the boy’s daughter does like to eat socks. Which is it?”

“She doesn’t actually eat socks,” I said, and with that it shone red. Not bad.

“...Correction. My daughter puts everything into her mouth,” I corrected, and the light disappeared.

“Ah, I see. That would explain why it did not react to her eating socks,” Alca said with a nod.

At the very least, I’ve confirmed that I can swap between referring to myself and Narikin without it reacting.

“Now then, have you finished your tests yet?” the pope asked.

“Not quite. It is still possible that it might not shine when I lie, or shine when I tell the truth. That said, no amount of experimenting could erase my suspicions completely. May we escalate the process and have me wear a collar during only the trial? Then you may order me not to tell a lie. Of course, I will have the collar removed when my innocence is proven.”

“...Very well, I permit it. Prepare a collar and contract magician,” the pope said.

Well, there was no reason for him to refuse if I was going out of my way to show I wouldn’t lie. This would at least stop them from arbitrarily deciding what was true and what wasn’t. Though him agreeing so readily might have been an indication that he really had prepared the tool just to see through lies.

“If possible, I would like for the High Priestess to be the one to put on the collar,” I added.

“Wha?! Narikin, my slave?!” she exclaimed.

“Indeed, anyone else might squeeze the collar on their own. I trust that you would not do the same, High Priestess.”

“Very well. I shall allow it.”

And so, a slave collar was prepared posthaste, with the High Priestess signing a slave contract for me to be her slave in this room alone and attaching a slave collar to me. There were no downsides to the collar, and on the plus side it wouldn't shine if I did lie. Not to mention all the time I managed to buy while waiting for the collar.

"Narikin... A-Ahem, sh-shall you kiss my feet?"

"That shouldn't be necessary; you can just give the order," I replied. Rokufako was watching, after all.

"I-Indeed! Narikin, you must not lie during this trial."

And so, my defense could finally begin. I decided to start out a bit on the offensive.

"First, let me say this. I was not the one responsible for Father Santaku's death. Since I have this opportunity, I'll say that Father Ragil ordered the assassin," I said.

"What are you talking about? Do you have any proof?" Father Ragil asked, looking completely unfazed. The Red Eye didn't shine, and so a stir went through the crowd. *Huh. I had thought they would've made it shine here, since it's a scandal for the pope faction, but maybe the collar trick is paying off here. Though... No, he wouldn't have sent the letter without a plan in the first place. I do have the letter with me, but it would be hard to say if it would actually be meaningful evidence.*

"I received a letter from Father Ragil the other day. It was brought by the assassin that killed Santaku. The letter was a threat saying that if I did not obey him, he would have me killed as Santaku was. The fact I'm telling the truth should be proven by this collar and the fact the Red Eye isn't shining."

"Nonsense. He has no proof that I sent such a letter. Either the letter was a forgery or the one who delivered it lied," Ragil said, denying it. Surely that was a lie, but the Red Eye seemed to have been set on me alone and didn't shine.

"What is the meaning of this? Father Ragil did? Impossible."

"But the Red Eye remains dark..."

“Ragil would certainly pull something of that sort.”

As a stir filled the room, the pope slammed his wooden gavel down onto his desk.

“Ragil’s words hold weight, and Narikin seems to be telling the truth. But there is no point arguing about this here; I will set the matter aside. Speak of your trial, Narikin,” the pope said. *Tch, he just brushed it aside.*

Having little other choice, I rolled with talking about the trial.

“I did the first trial without making any deals with devils. I built the bridge with my own magic. I’m skilled with that kind of magic, and am also known as Narikin the Construction Mage,” I said. No need to think about any lies here, it was all true. Not a single lie.

“For the second trial, I managed it through trial and error while thinking back to my talks with Father Santaku and documents I had seen in the past. In the first place, isn’t it normal for students to surpass their master? I don’t think there’s anything unusual about it. Naturally, I made the Narikin Machine with my own two hands.”

Those documents were the ones I had seen in Japan, and I had thought about talking with Santaku while making it, so that, too, was no lie.

Oh, and all that about disciples was just speaking generally, not about me in particular.

“Moving on, I entered the Church of Light right after I was born. I became Father Santaku’s disciple around the same time. I was in the empire until just recently, and if there aren’t any records of me here, it must have been Father Santaku’s doing. Thinking about it now, I think Father Santaku might have been planning something, but I don’t know what he was thinking.”

This was a bit tricky. It was true that not even a year had passed since Narikin’s birth, and that he was registered as Santaku’s disciple. Thus, neither the collar nor the Red Eye reacted.

I thought maybe it would shine here, but maybe in a shocking twist the Red Eye literally only detected actual lies?

“I think that settles all the charges against me. Have I proven my innocence?” I asked.

The pope put a thoughtful hand on his chin under the veil. “Hm... You do seem to have a clever mouth.”

“What?”

He took out a mirror. “Ah, you see. All the pieces of this puzzle fit together if you are not a human. Your phrasing... You joined right after you were born? You can use special magic? Certainly, you have the techniques to fool the High Priestess and judges. It would explain, too, why you may evade the collar and Red Eye,” he said, directing the mirror my way. Yep, it sure showed Narikin’s face. “This is a divine instrument granted to us by the God of Light: the [Mirror of Truth]. Those basked in its light return to their true form. With this, it will be obvious whether you are truly human or not.”

What the hell?! Use that to turn a queen cursed into looking like a dog back into human form! And then break!

The mirror shone before I could say anything. I was basked in its light with no time to avoid anything.

“Clink clink! Clink... clink!”

I tried defending myself, but my mouth just made clinking noises. My human morphing had been forcefully canceled, returning me to Living Armor form.

“Behold, you are an inhuman monster! Feast your eyes upon the creature, those gathered here today!”

...Okay, it's over.

But just as I was about to give up...

“An... angel?” came a voice behind me. I turned without thinking, and saw that Rokufa-ko—who had been sitting directly behind me—had likewise had her human form forcibly canceled. She had wings and a halo floating above her.

“My lady. You are out of human form,” Toi said, as she casually put on her hood to cover her ears.

“Oh? That’s weird. What’s going on?”

“It must be because the light shone in our direction.”

“That must mean... Oh. Narikin’s human form is reversed, too. He can’t talk now?”

“Correct, my lady.”

Rokufa-ko seemed pretty relaxed as she remained sitting. The people near her had all hurriedly prostrated after seeing she was an angel.

“An angel?! Why is an angel here?!”

“I-Is she here to punish the heretic?!”

“That’s right, she must be! O wondrous angel!”

Assurance spread through the crowd, and they all called for Rokufa the angel to punish me.

“Silence, silence!” the pope roared, slamming his gavel down, but the priests were too taken in by the sight of an angel.

“Lady R-Rokufa is an... an... angel?! And Lord Narikin is a monster...? Wh-Whaaat?!” Alca cried.

“I’m surprised that the boy’s a monster, but isn’t that girl supposed to be his wife?’ Magni asked.

“I-I am seeing an angel with my own eyes for the first time! Ah, but I am looking down upon her from this height. Is this not disrespectful?!” Barakd stammered.

“An angel...? Oooh,” Ragil moaned.

The High Priestess and the judges had been thrown into a panic. Huh. I shrugged with a clink and looked Rokufa-ko’s way.

“Oh? Wait, is this one of those situations where I have to do something to settle it?” she asked.

“That appears to be the case, my lady. What will you do?”

“Eheheh, just wait and see!” Rokufa-ko stood up smoothly. That alone sent moans of approval from the gathered priests.

“(Erm, what do you intend to do...?)”

“(Like I said, just wait and see!)”

Rokufa stood beside me, hovering in the air. She then... wrapped her arms around me and hugged me close. “This is my husband. Wonderful, isn’t he? I’m not giving him to you, High Priestess! Got it?!” she declared, pointing at Alca out of nowhere.

“Er, um... O-Okay, Lady Rokufa?”

“There! You said ‘okay’! I’ll complain to the God of Light if you lie to me, got it?!”

“R-Right! I swear it, by the God of Light!”

Hearing that, Rokufa exhaled triumphantly.

“(Uh?)”

“(Juuust wait,)” she said, then pulled off my head to get the collar off. *Nooo, the contract...*

“Removing a collar like this is a miracle, no? You can have it back, High Priestess. Okay... Pope. Might I borrow that mirror of yours?”

“...May I ask why, O angel?”

“Oh, is it my responsibility to explain myself? I am an angel, and I am telling you to give it to me. Will you defy me, human? Or is there a reason you would ignore an angel’s wish?”

“This is a divine instrument granted to me by the God of Light.”

“Do you think that gives you an excuse to not obey my orders? Even after exposing my identity like this? Was it to your right to make all my efforts to handle this gracefully a waste?” Rokufa-ko asked, piling the pressure onto the pope.

“Ngh, but, I...!”

“But what? Quit being stubborn and just hand it over! That mirror is in the way!” Rokufa-ko barked, trying to forcibly grab the mirror, and in the process she bumped it. The mirror spun around instantly and shone light upon the

pope.

“Ngh!”

“Ah.”

I could see bones beyond the veil. Or rather, I could actually see that his hands had turned entirely to bone. Not as a metaphor; his boney whites were there to see.

“Hold on a second, pope! You were ranting about him being a monster and all that, but look at you! You’re a monster, too!”

“N-No! Th-This is the result of an ancient spell I used to defeat dungeons!” the pope cried, letting go of the mirror and trying to yank his veil on. But his hands were still bone. Hiding his face didn’t help.

“A-An undead?! The pope is undead?!”

“What the, what is going on?! What’s the meaning of this?!”

“He must be a fake! Where is the real pope?!”

The crowd was thrown into an even bigger fuss than before. Rokufa stole the mirror and kept shining it on the pope. The High Priestess and the others seemed to be agonizing over whether they should draw their weapons.

“Looks like you were the real heretic. Pope! It’s time for you to pay the flutist!” Rokufa-ko declared, pointing her finger at him. That weird line at the end was prooobably the auto-translator bugging out on the expression “pay the piper.”



“Ngh! I have made my judgment! Medpriest Narikin is a heretic! Those who agree, raise your hands!” the pope shouted in a hurry, slamming his gavel down hard. Naturally, nobody just got caught up in the flow and—

“...Agreed.”

“...Understood.”

“...As you will.”

“He is a heretic...”

...Or so I thought, but literally everyone here except Rokufa-ko and Toi lifted their hands with empty looks in their eyes. Including Alca and Magni.

“Wha, but why?!” Rokufa-ko exclaimed at them.

“Ah...? O-Oh? What was I...?” Alca said, trailing off.

“Hrm? Did something happen?” Magni asked.

“Why are you yelling?” Barakd asked.

“Hrm...?” Ragil mumbled.

It seemed they regained their faculties the moment Rokufa-ko yelled at them. Some priests looked at the bony pope and jumped with surprise all over again.

“My lord, my lady. I sensed the activation of a control skill just now.”

A control skill? I was one to talk, but that was kinda hardcore... Or rather, if he could do that, why hold his farce? And what was the point in forcibly concluding the judgment regardless?

“That you did not fall under my control is proof that you are heretics. Heh, but fear not, in a few moments there will be no evidence that any of you were here; nobody will even remember this,” the pope said. Apparently he had something that would remove even memories. It would follow, then, that he needed the heretic judgment in order to activate whatev—

“You are guilty. With the recognition of over ten archpriests, I submit for the activation of {Punishment}. Come forth, O God of Light, and bring your divine judgment upon these filthy heretics!”

“(Rokuko, get out! This is likely ritual magic, and something dangerous!)”

“(Eep?!)”

Unfortunately, before we could cancel our possessions, a gate of light appeared in the ceiling. It opened, and all but the pope and I knelt. Alca was trembling with her mouth shut tightly, and even Toi and Rokufa-ko the angel were kneeling.

“None can escape a god. Submit, heretic, for the God of Light has come to enact punishment upon you.”

As the pope said, I couldn’t cancel my possession. It was locked... But at least I could morph back into human form. I went ahead and did that.

“What’s going on here, pope?” I asked the skeleton pope. He hadn’t morphed back to human form, at least.

“Hmph, I knew from the very start that you were not a human. Judging by your history, I suppose you are another dog of the empire? Well done, sliding this far in.”

...Okay, that’s completely correct. But wait, what another?

“I would not have needed to use my control skill had you accepted your sin at the trial. I will admit it; you are exceptionally skilled. I cannot even imagine what secrets you have uncovered and leaked to that ivory pig. Thus, I will undo all that you have done with {Punishment}.”

Undo it? In other words, this {Punishment} thing was a highly convenient skill that would delete me, my records, and everything I had ever done.

Holy crap, that’s scary. So, wait... Did Haku fail to learn anything important no matter how many people she sent into the Holy Kingdom because they were all deleted by {Punishment}? Haku’s files and memories would’ve been deleted, too. There was no way to plan for it, since your memories of it happening would be gone, so you would keep falling for the same thing. It was the ultimate insurance, guaranteed by a god.

“And if you erase all records of me from the world, this trial would never have happened in the first place. You’ll erase the fact you used the gavel’s control

skill, and that everyone saw your true form.”

“Ahaha, truly, you are a fast thinker. That is correct. Though I alone will remember this history following the {Punishment}. Believe me, I will take more care next time.”

The pope sure was being talkative here. Maybe he was just that confident in me being eliminated.

Yeaah, even I'd be in a tough spot if the God of Light himself killed me. After all, he's the boss of the Heroes, and on the same level as Father. It should be easy for him to just blast me into absolute nothingness. I pray that I revive and can just cancel the possession. Though who knows if I'll be able to revive Narikin after that.

As I pondered what was coming next, a man radiating dazzling light descended from the gate. By radiating light I don't mean from ornaments or anything; it was literal light. Kind of made me want sunglasses.

“Here in your true form this time, pope?” the God of Light asked, his dissatisfied voice booming through the room. “Anyway, do you know how annoying it is to be summoned every time like this? Maybe be a bit more considerate.”

“My apologies, O God of Light.”

“Good grief. You do know it's this very reason that I can't let the Holy Kingdom summon any Heroes to maintain the balance, right? And it's already been a hundred years of this. Learn to handle things a bit better... Anyway, who do you want punished this time?”

“Indeed! Please punish the rude man you see before you, Narikin. In exchange for our memories of him, please do erase his existence.”

“Good grief, if you insist. Behold my divine puni— Oh?” The God of Light paused, looking my way. “Oh, it's you. Been a while! I didn't recognize you at first, due to that body. Hahaha, you said all that about being lazy, but look at how hard you've been working, huh?”

“...H-Hey, been a while. You remember me?” I asked without thinking, so

surprised by him chatting with me all friendly-like.

“Of course I do! Who could forget someone like you? So, how’ve you liked your Hero power? It can turn you into trees, stones, anything! It was the closest thing to what you asked for, so I hope you’ve liked it,” he said. Oh yeah, I vaguely remembered talking about something like that. “Also, I started you off next to a dungeon that’d be easy as pie to destroy, so you must’ve awoken to it right away, right? In your world, you call that a tutorial.”

“Er, right. You’ve been a big help, thanks.”

It was less that I was put close to it and more that I was summoned by the dungeon, but... My being summoned by Rokuko was his work, huh?

“Keep up the good work; just keep on doing what you’re doing,” the God of Light said, no doubt smiling brightly. Though the light was literally brightening to the point I couldn’t see his face.

“Anywaaay, let me just finish what I came here for... Wait, hm? You’re the one he wants punished? Hold on a second, why would you need divine punishment? And now that I’m looking closer, those fancy armbands are actually handcuffs, aren’t they?”

Come on. Who would wear armbands like this?

“God of Light! That man is a heretic, a monster! You must destroy him with your divine punishment!”

“What are you talking about, pope? No way is he a heretic. Nobody’s getting punished this time,” the God of Light said, casually snapping my handcuffs off. *Wowee, I’m getting off scot-free. I did it.*

“But, but, th-that won’t do, O God of Light! It’s a violation of our contract!”

“...You’re complaining about technicalities when using a different name and working me to death? Well, I am glad I get more opportunities to appear in the world thanks to you, but you’re the one getting far too much from the singular wish each pope gets,” the God of Light said with a shrug. “But no. The contract I made with you... Er, excuse me. The contract I made with the pope of seven generations ago had a special clause for this. So I am not violating it.”

“A special clause... Ah?!” The pope faltered, likely realizing what clause that was.

“Did you think you could trick me with that wrongful judgment a second ago? Try that again and I’ll remove your existence instead.”

“M-My apologies!”

“I shall grant a penalty. Hm... Spend some time in that form, and do not try to hide it,” the God of Light said, snapping his fingers and causing the pope’s veil to fly off, revealing his skeleton face. He almost covered his face with his bone hands, but stopped due to the God of Light’s warning. “Also, if you want to keep being pope, I’ll be questioning your faith again soon. Understood?”

“Ngh... Y-Yes, O God of Light.”

“Okay, I’m about out of time. Time really does fly when you’re having fun, jeez... Bye bye.”

The God of Light waved my way, flew back up the gate, and was gone.

The room remained silent even after the gate of light closed.

“Welp. I sure am innocent,” I said.

“Impossible... This can’t be...!” the pope groaned. Unfortunately for him, he had made several errors.

First of all, he considered me affiliated with dungeons. That wasn’t wrong in and of itself, but he must have convinced himself I cleared the trials through the power of dungeons. It certainly would have been possible for me to just buy the bridge and stuff with DP, but I ended up just using my own power instead. Just out of habit.

Next, he didn’t realize that Rokufa-ko was actually an angel. Revealing my true form was a good call to begin with, since indeed I was just a dungeon monster. However, never in a million years would he have thought that an angel, highly worshiped within the Church of Light, was right behind me and ready to mess things up. *And to be fair, I didn’t expect my true form to be revealed here either.*

Most of all, he didn’t realize I was a Hero. I had met the God of Light before,

and thereby evaded {Punishment}. That was his biggest error; nobody would have ever thought a Living Armor was actually a Hero inside. The God of Light probably overlooked it partially thanks to my Hero skill being {Ultra Transformation}. There was nothing odd at all about me transforming into a Living Armor then using human form.

...Yeah, I'm glad I was slow to run away. If I had just ended the possession, Narikin probably would have been erased from existence.

In any case, the pope had gotten cocky and done a lot that he thought would be erased through the {Punishment}, but it was all still here. Whew, that must suck. Let's see if he can take responsibility.

"So, is there anyone here who wants for the current pope to remain the pope?" Rokufa-ko asked with a grin, still in angel form. That was a cruel question. There was the blatantly undead pope, and then there was the angel, floating with wings and a halo shining a bit brighter due to basking in the God of Light's radiance a second ago. "Pretty sure an undead pope like this won't look good at all!"

"This form is the result of using an ancient spell. You all witnessed that the God of Light himself did not reproach my form."

"Oh my! But he did scold you for brainwashing everyone to overturn the results of a heretic inquisition, no?"

"I have already been punished for that! It is not an issue!"

The pope obstinately fought back against Rokufa-ko's questioning. It was true that the priests were hardly in a position to punish the pope after their god had already done so.

However, they hadn't been told not to lose their faith in the pope. The mood in the room was blatantly one of suspicion toward him. The pope himself was trembling a bit, no doubt sensing that.

"Those who wish for the pope to step down, please stand," Rokufa said. Alca the High Priestess stood first, then the priests began to stand.

"You lot! Who will you believe here?! Me, the one who has supported the country for years, or that medpriest from nowhere?! This country would have

been swallowed up by the empire years ago if not for me!” the pope roared. But over ten archpriests had already stood—even Barakd was standing.

“Why do you defy me?! I and no other am the symbol of this country! I have led you foolish humans for centuries! Have you forgotten the debt you owe me?!”

“You’re being a sore loser, pope,” Rokufa-ko said, crossing her legs confidently in the air.

“Three hundred years. I spent three hundred years building the country up to this point... All the pieces were in place, and I was finally about to move... If not for you lot! Fine... I did not want to do this, but you’ve left me no choice...”

“What, you have another trick up your sleeve? Just quit mumbling and give up already.”

The pope speedily took out a small vial from his clothes. Inside was a small black shard... a dungeon seed. And with it, he...

“O my subordinate, rule this land! {Wake: Undead Core}!”

“Wha?!”

Before we could move to stop the pope, pure darkness enveloped the room.

* * *

In the next instant, we—including the priests that were in the room—found ourselves in the center of a room with purple craggy walls.

“What the heck just happened...?” Rokufa-ko asked.

“Dunno, but it seems like we got moved somewhere,” I replied. At the very least, this wasn’t the room where the trial had been held. A path continued deeper in.

“My lord. I am glad to see you safe,” Toi said. She seemed to be fine as well... and she had swiftly hidden her ears and tail again.

“Ouch, ouch, ouch... Good grief, what was all that about?”

“Wh-Where is this? What happened to us...”

“Your holiness...”

Magni, Barakd, and Ragil were here as well. Oh, but Alca the High Priestess wasn't.

Can you hear me, O fools who would defy me? reverberated the pope's voice. *You are now useless to me. I have decided to kill you all. It's time for a massacre.*

The priests went pale at that. A Goblin... Or rather, an Undead Goblin entered the room. It was wielding a crappy knife.

If you wish to be saved, swear obedience unto me, the pope said, and Ragil stepped in front of the Undead Goblin.

"O holy pope! I, Ragil, swear my loyalty to you!"

Aaah, honest Ragil. I trusted you would. You have always been my right-hand man.

"I-In that case," Ragil began, but was instantly stabbed in the chest by the Undead Goblin. "Y-Your, holiness?"

Bwahaha, fear not. You will be revived as my subordinate.

Ragil collapsed. And then... stood right back up.

"Ooh, how wonderful! What wonderful power! Truly, this is the miracle of {Resurrection}! The hidden technique of the Church of Light, entrusted to only the pope!" Ragil explained, turning this way proudly.

"Ragil, you..."

"What's wrong, Magni? Ah..."

The knife was still in Ragil's chest. Upon noticing that, he violently pulled it out. A gush of blood sprayed out, then began pouring down his chest.

"Fear not. It hurts only at the start. Now, the rest of you, come swear your loyalty to the pope!"

"A Zombie... Is this some kind of nightmare? I'd like to wake up, but... Seems like this is reality," Magni said, opening her {Storage} and taking out a massive black-iron ax larger than she was. "I was only ever a High Priestess candidate, but I can still do this much. {Enchant: Sacred}. I'll use the God of Light's blessing to bury you."

“Wha?”

With her ax glowing bright white with holy power, Magni sped forward faster than anyone could have imagined an old woman would, and cut both Ragil and the Undead Goblin in half with a single slice. Their undead corpses immediately turned to ash.

How cruel, Magni. Was Ragil not your disciple?

“We went our separate ways a long while ago. Not to mention, it’s my job as his teacher to take responsibility and bury him.”

Ah, enough. You may resist if you like, the pope said, with an amused tone. However, you reside in the most evil of dungeons, which the High Priestess Alca herself determined to be unconquerable. It is safe to say it is the most fearsome dungeon of all, as recognized by the dungeon-conquering Alca. Will you be able to reach me, I wonder?

He made it sound like Alca the High Priestess was stuck in here as well. Though, well, given that she was the only one not here, she probably was.

“Those who can fight, come with me! We’re going in!” Magni yelled. She had made the instant decision to delve into the dungeon. Many people reacted to Magni’s cry; as one would expect from priests of the Church of Light, none here were too weak to fight.

That said, there were several priests frozen with fear after seeing Ragil turn into a zombie and get cut down. Naturally, no one else tried swearing loyalty to the pope, but...

“My lord. What shall I do?” Toi asked, holding up the birdcage. Tran (Narikin) and Ceiver (Rokufa) were looking my way with determined eyes, but... As I wondered about what to do, a man came to me. He seemed fairly buff under his priest clothes, and his stature was overbearing... Wait, hold on.

“Mama, what now?”

“Hugo, really? What are you doing here?”

It was Hugo. I hadn’t been able to tell at first since he was wearing proper clothing.

“I heard you would be on stage, mama? But, well, Ragil invited me.”

Friggin’ Ragil, did he plan to assassinate me if it came down to it? Well, whatever.

“Anyway, I’m gonna go with Magni and beat the crap out of the pope.”

“I’ll go, too, then! I wanna help you, mama!”

I wanted to say he’d be a strong ally, but to be honest it was impossible to say how strong the pope was. If we assume that the pope’s real identity was indeed Core 10, it would put him on the same level as Haku, the Great Demon King, and even Core 50. I’d be cautious even with Heroes on my side.

Rokufa-ko tugged on my sleeve. “Dear. Let’s go alone.”

“Huh? Where’s this coming from?”

“If we want to use the tricks up our sleeves, Toi and Hugo will just get in the way. Have them go with the priest group instead. Okay, dear? Let’s get through this alone!” Rokufa-ko declared.

“Seriously? This is a dungeon Alca thought would be impossible to beat. We can’t go alone.”

“We can. Or really, if we don’t go soon, we might not be able to ever. We’re the best for this job, you and I. No doubt about it!” Rokufa-ko said with a wink, her expression brimming with confidence that came from who-knows-where. I blinked, trying to figure out why, when suddenly I felt an unusual sense of déjà vu at what I saw at the end of the hallway.

“...Oh. I get it.”

With that, I noticed. Rokuko was certainly right here. Sheesh, either the pope was just the unluckiest guy in the world or the gods actually had abandoned him.

“Toi and Hugo, go help Magni. We’ll go on ahead.”

“Understood, my lord.”

“Okay. If you insist, mama, I will. But will you be okay?”

“Don’t worry about it. I know this dungeon well.”

“Mhm, more than anyone!” Rokufa-ko added. And so, we took the lead to conquering the dungeon.

That is, this copy of the [Cave of Greed].

* * *

“You contacted Niku and the others, right? Okay, let’s go! We’ll show them how strong we married couples can be!” Rokufa-ko said.

“(We’ve gotta win before he changes the layouts, yeah,)” I replied.

Rokufa-ko the angel was wearing a full set of Living Armor... armor. The previously male set of armor fit her perfectly thanks to her {Full-Body Equipment Aptitude}. The priests had been shocked at the sight of her putting it on, saying it was a miracle.

The reason why Rokufa-ko could wear me was simple. This body had a coating of orichalcum, which made it as strong offensively and defensively as could be. Then, using her angel’s flight, she could ignore all the traps on the ground. In other words, we could just force our way to victory. We should be able to advance quickly, since angels didn’t seem to get tired while flying.

“Okay, let’s go!” Rokufa-ko exclaimed.

“(Yeah... Wait, what?! Whoa! You can fly this fast?!)”

Rokufa-ko kicked off the ground and walls to accelerate. She completely skipped by the entrance area, flying through the proper route before the Goblin Zombies could even react.

“The impossibly hard dungeon that even the High Priestess couldn’t conquer... That’s right! Ahaha, go ahead, praise me.”

“(You sure are in a good mood.)”

“Uh-huh, I feel better than I ever have, obviously.”

Well, yeah, nobody would feel bad about their dungeon being complimented.

We didn’t get lost in the labyrinth area. She used the Golem heads as platforms while charging through.

“Wait, what? Was there always a wall here?” she asked.

“(I modified this part in the past. Pretty sure this wall was here when Alca came.)”

“I see. We’ve added onto the dungeon by now, so it’s even more evil and devilish,” Rokufa-ko said proudly, punching the wall to break through. It may have only been a coating, but the power of orichalcum was still to be feared. We advanced farther in, taking a shortcut through the spiral staircase area by jumping down to the bottom.

“So! There was a black Wolf we crossed a second ago. Maybe he’s recreating Rin!”

“(Maybe.)”

The storage area was recreated pretty well, too. Though we didn’t have the time to see what he had done with the hallway leading to the [Flame Cavern]. That said... This artificial dungeon, or rather, undead dungeon? It was pretty close to the real thing, which was impressive; though maybe that was the pope’s power.

Thus, we made it all the way to the coliseum without stopping... Or, wait, at the time this was still just the Boss Room. This was where the arm-loaded Haniwa Golem had fought Alca and the Black Wolf Slime, Rin. This was as much as Alca knew about our dungeon, so in short, we had gotten to the end.

It was a purple, rocky room, wide enough for a Horse Golem to run along the walls. In the center was a headless knight wearing a headless horse Dullahan, and the skeleton pope. They were the undead dungeon’s boss, it seemed.

“You two... An angel wearing a Living Armor, how interesting. The armor morphing to suit its wearer is a clever solution. Still, to think you came right this way without getting lost. Is that some angelic power? It hardly seems fair,” the pope said.

“Something like that. Now give up and surrender, pope,” Rokufa-ko said, jabbing her finger at him.

“Well, regardless. You are all on death row. All I need is Alca, the successful product of my artificial Hero plot. I will need to take my time thoroughly retraining her, but... I suppose it will be amusing *and* effective to show her the

bones of the man she was so smitten with,” the pope cackled, bones chattering.

“(You sure like to talk, don’t you, pope?)”

“Correct. This is me we are talking about here. With a single word, I can summon an undead army a thousand strong. Do you think you of all people could beat me?”

“That’s our line! Summon, Call Kobold!” Rokuko declared, opening her {Storage}. A kobold launched out of her {Storage}, wagging its tail happily with two Golem Knives in hand. “Go!”

“Hah! What can a mere kobold do?”

The kobold trotted over, then suddenly took a sharp step forward and slid up close to the pope. However, the Dullahan smoothly got in the way. Its sword blocked the Golem Knives.

“Oho, I almost let my guard down. Deal with him, Dullahan.”

“Not bad. We’ll both start with our subordinates, then. Take care of him, Niku.”

The headless knight and the Kobold... or rather, the Niku-possessed Kobold, faced off. The Kobold readied its knife, then charged. It slid under the horse and chopped at its feet. Before long, it crumpled down.

“Kneel before me—{Ten Gravity}.”

Black mana shot out of the pope. The Kobold collapsed upon the ground, then exploded. Dullahan likewise was crushed into the ground. To think he’d attack his ally, too.

“I did not expect a Kobold to be so destructive. I suppose an Undead Core’s monsters can only do so much,” the pope said with a shrug. It then looked our way.

“...Why can you stand? The gravity in this room has increased tenfold.”

“Huh?”

“(Hm?)”

Rokufa-ko tilted her head. On second thought, he had a point; the Kobold got

crushed, but we didn't feel the weight at all.

“Ah, I see, that's how it is. How could I forget? Angels are like Ghosts, and can cancel gravity. It's a conceptual effect. And one that extends to the armor?”

Angels didn't fly, they floated. In other words, they operated outside of gravity. The armor was probably fine since the angel's skill made the armor change to suit their floating.

I extended a hand to the pope and launched {Elemental Burst} without any chant... and he dodged it.

“{Judgment Ray}, hm...? Not bad, angel; it is not easy to cast King-tier magic without a chant.”

Apparently he mistook {Element Burst} for another kind of light. Couldn't really blame him, since both were beams of light. Though unlike that Light spell, my spell was mana efficient. I could blast out a ton like it was nothing.

“Hrm, aha, so you can cast it in rapid sequence. You have an incredible mana capacity, despite it not seeming so. Or is it due to the God of Light's remnants? Now I wish to capture you and do some research. Perhaps you will be useful for god killing,” the pope said, while lightly dancing around in his skeleton body to dodge the bursts, sometimes using short-range teleports. Still, dodging meant that it would be bad for him if one hit. I shot out a burst from my knee, hoping to land a surprise attack, and...

“Hrm. You can fire from there as well, I see,” the pope said, knocking aside my beam of light aside with the Khakkhara-esque pope staff in his hand. The beam of light was clearly larger than his pope staff, but when struck it bent its angle and avoided him.

“Ahaha, this is an adamantite staff made with all the technology the Holy Kingdom has to offer. My mana flows through it well... What do you think? Our technology surpasses that of the dwarves surrounding the empire by decades,” he continued, pausing. I tried shooting several more blasts, but he knocked them all aside with his staff with some inhuman parries.

Rokuko clicked her tongue. “Tch, you're a slippery one.”

“What, you make it sound like you could beat me if they hit. Very well... See

what happens,” the pope said, standing in place. He definitely had a counterplan in place, but not taking the bait wasn’t an option. I hit him with an especially big one... But as expected, the pope didn’t even budge, even after getting hit directly with an {Element Burst}.

“Hahaha, too bad. It has no effect on me,” he cackled. That had been a direct hit, too, and it hadn’t passed through him to the back. But why didn’t it work? {Element Burst} was strong enough to work on even Leona.

“As expected. That spell is something else, but it is not enough to overcome my magic defense.”

“Ngh! What trick are you pulling?!”

“Unfortunately for you, unlike the miracles of those fools, there is no trick or deception here. This is simply the difference of our experience, our existence. I am an Elder Lich that has lived over five hundred years. I have conquered even that which should be my greatest weakness, Light magic... In short, magic simply does not work on me.”

“Have you spent the past five centuries modifying your body or something?”

“Hm, something of the sort. I have learned from you humans and built up experience over time, treating sustained effort as the most valuable of tools. Luckily, I have spent more than enough time in this body,” the pope said with a shrug.

If magic doesn’t work, I’ll have to use something physical, but... The ten-times-heavier gravity means we can’t use Niku Kobolds, and he’s fast on his feet. I don’t see how we can damage him at all. Are we just stuck?

“Now it is my turn. I see now that gravity attacks will not work, but how then should one kill an angel? Hm... I shall try physically crushing you. {Wall Press}.”

The pope clapped his hands, and a second later stone walls shot out from either side, crushing us.

And then they spread back apart.

“Ngh, oh no, we’re going to get crushed!”

“(Uh, I mean. We already got crushed, didn’t we?)”

“Bwuh? But we didn’t get flattened.”

Rokufa-ko blinked in surprise. She didn’t notice the walls not slamming on us? Talk about being slow on the uptake.

“What in the...? The walls caved in... Well, I see your wings and halo have no physical form at least,” the pope said. I glanced to the side and saw that there were indeed human-shaped impressions in the walls.

Oh yeah, this whole set of armor (Narikin) is coated with orichalcum.

“Impressive defense. Did you acquire a Holy Kingdom suit of full adamantite armor? If so, it only makes sense that a stone wall would do nothing... {Thunderfall},” the pope said, moving his left hand as if to crush bugs. An instant later, lightning rained down upon us.

“Eep, so bright!” Rokufa-ko yelped. However, it passed through solely my metal Living Armor body, and Rokufa-ko inside didn’t get hurt at all. In fact, it kind of seemed that her wings and halo got a bit brighter than before.

“Lightning tends to be effective against metal, but I see, it does not work against angels. Your resistances are bothersome.”

“Wait, what? That bright thingy was lightning?”

I felt that Rokuko not noticing *that* was kind of impressive. But that just went to show how it was doing no damage at all. Angels sure were something else.

“So beings like this protect the gods, hm? This is a good opportunity. I will experiment with how to kill angels. I will only benefit by knowing how to efficiently kill angel soldiers,” the pope said, putting a thoughtful hand on his chin. “Very well. First, I will ignore your defenses and attack your inside directly. Crush thine heart—{Heartbreak}.”

The pope thrust out his right hand, opened it, then clenched it into a fist.

“Oh no, even I’ll die if my heart gets crushed!”

“(Hey, it kinda looks like your wings and halo shone for a second there. Did you resist it?)”

“Hm? I dunno,” Rokufa-ko said, pressing a hand on her chest. *Yeaah, I think you’d know if your heart was crushed.*

“...Curse resistance as well? Truly bothersome. How about Darkness magic? {Darkness Wall}, and on top of that, {Darkflame}.”

His Darkness magic activated, engulfing the room in darkness. Dark flames mercilessly swallowed us up, and...

“Nothing happened? Ngh, then what could possibly work?”

...It did not hurt Rokufa-ko in the least.

“(Hold on, isn’t it dark now?)”

“Mm? I can see just fine.”

Apparently Darkness didn’t work on angels. Though judging by the shining of her wings and halo, the God of Light’s power was probably still here.

“Aha, incredible. To think you could unilaterally nullify Darkness. In that case, Fire? Water? Wind, Earth,” he said, blasting spell after spell at us. However, an angel in orichalcum-coated armor was just too strong. The fire evaporated, and the water was knocked aside. The wind shook her a bit, but the earth couldn’t even scratch her hard armor.

“Hmmm. None seem to work,” the pope said.

“My armor is top of its class.”

“No damage slips through even its cracks. What skill is that?”

It was true that even though I had minimized cracks and openings in this Narikin armor, the plate helmet did have holes for eyes. And yet, even those holes weren’t letting damage through.

That was probably due to her armor-adaptation skill working even to cover the cracks. In a game, characters gained defense from armor and took less damage without their movements being restricted or their vision being blocked. It was pretty much like that. Man, covering one’s whole body with orichalcum, what a ridiculous cheat skill.

Anyway, the pope put a hand on his chin. It made a bony, knocking sound.

“This is all good to know. And yet, troubling. What must I do to kill you?”

“I would rather stay alive, just saying. And really, what do we have to do to kill

YOU? Or are you going to say that since you're undead, you're already technically dead?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Still, I am at a loss... I may have to throw up my hands. It seems that it is a bit beyond me to kill you lot," the pope said, raising his right hand. "O ye Narikin. I have a suggestion."

"(A suggestion?)"

The pope nodded. "At this rate, I will not be able to kill you. That could be considered my defeat," he said, his bones clinking. "The special clause... You are a Hero, no? I will return you to your original world. My condition, then, would be that you no longer involve yourself in this world. With my power, I could even send a second person as well. What say you?"

EPILOGUE

One month passed. We defeated the pope and returned home, and not just to any home, either: my home in Japan—where I now lived not by myself, but with Rokuko.

The pope kept his promise and sent Rokuko and me back to earth. He asked who I would bring with me, and I chose her without a moment's hesitation. He couldn't send back more than two, so I had to say my goodbyes to everyone else. I did in fact go back to town and throw a farewell gathering. I entrusted all of Goren and the [Cave of Greed] to Soto, then left the rest to Niku and the others.

Even putting aside my parental bias, Soto was a skilled girl, and Rei and the others would support her. I ended up heading back to Japan without telling Haku, for obvious reasons, but Soto would handle that for me. The only thing left I had to worry about was... Soto going nuts for socks, really.

Anyway, in this world without magic or skills, I was right back to being a normal person. Except that I was a bit more buff than I used to be. Maybe that was thanks to my training in the Demon Realm? Either way, there was no getting around the fact I was powerless compared to before. I considered the possibility that Soto's {Storage} dungeon would connect even across worlds, but it didn't. Oh well.

There was nothing more I could do. I was incredibly curious to know what was going on over there, but thanks in part to my contract with the pope, I couldn't interfere with that world anymore. No point worrying about it, so I decided to stop thinking.

All that said, people did need money to live. I made a living doing remote work I could do at home. I didn't want to work, but one had to work to afford food. Things just didn't go the way you wanted to.

As for Rokuko, she had passed an interview at a local convenience store the other day. She had managed with a half-empty resume, and by directing

payments to my bank account. Not bad. I would put my hopes on her becoming a manager and supporting me with her wages.

“Bleh... Did I fall asleep?” I mumbled to myself. Seemed like I had fallen asleep with the lights still on.

The fluorescent lights lit up a bed, and my beloved bed cover. The PC monitor was near my pillow, with a controller, keyboard, and mouse in close range. They served as tools for both play and work; I had missed them while away from Japan.

I was also wearing my usual jersey, but... It had gotten pretty raggedy. Though, well, that didn't mean it was any less good for sleeping in.

Oh, right, today's garbage day. Gotta go and toss it.

“Mm? Keimaaa?” came a voice from under the covers. It was Rokuko. Seemed like she had slid into my bed again. She was basically taking after Niku here, slipping into my bed whenever she could. She liked the smell or something, and often conquered the bed as her own territory.

“...Mmm.” She sat up a bit and rubbed her blue eyes, wearing the T-shirt she used as bedwear here. She yawned and looked around, brushing aside the golden locks that had stuck to her forehead as she slept.

Her eyes finally found me, and with a grin she cuddled up. “Keima, I love you. I looove you. Eheheh.”

“Y-Yeah.”

She was like that all the time now. Once we came to Japan and escaped Haku's eyes, I finally laid my hands on her, so to speak. She had turned into a total sweetheart ever since then, just melting in my arms. I wanted to go through a proper marriage with her, and I was saving up money while seeing if I couldn't do something about Rokuko's citizenship. Maybe she was already a common-law wife or something.

“So, Keima. I looked at your computer while you were asleep, but... This story you're writing is about us, isn't it?”

“W-Well... Yeah.”

The truth was, I was writing a story about our experiences bit by bit as I remembered them, hoping it would be a big hit. My dream was to have an anime adaptation. A movie adaption, even. Though the first question was whether I could even finish writing it, my experience writing the Beddhist bible back then was proving useful here.



“Show it to me when you’re done. It’s a promise, okay?” Rokuko said.

“Sure. I’ll show it to you first. Promise,” I replied. Rokuko smiled with satisfaction, then kissed my cheek. S-Still wasn’t used to that. My cheeks heated up.

“Keima, Keima. Let’s kiss.”

“H-Hold on a second, Rokuko. I gotta go toss the trash.”

Rokuko was holding me down... Until suddenly, her stomach grumbled.

“...You plan on eating me?”

“N-No! Aaah, aaah, I’m just so hungry. I want to eat something before it’s time for work. I think a melon roll will do.”

“You’ll get fat if you snack like that, y’know.”

“It’s fine, I burn calories fast,” Rokuko said, opening her menu and popping out a melon roll.

...Huh?

“They have me restock the convenience store thanks to this little trick. I sure am a hard worker, aren’t I?”

“Hold on a second. Where’d that melon roll come from? Did you use DP on it...? I thought we couldn’t use magic or skills here.”

“What’re you talking about? Dungeon functions aren’t magic or skills.”

“No way, that doesn’t make sense. This is Japan, remember?”

“Um, well, I guess? You do have a point... But what’s this melon roll, then?”
The melon roll disappeared from Rokuko’s hand. “...It disappeared.”

“It sure did.”

I looked up with a start, and pinched my cheek. It hurt, but only a little.

“Seems like we’re seeing a carefully crafted dream. This kind of pain is like what one feels in a dream.”

“A dream? You can tell that by pinching?”

“It’s kind of a ritual to tell whether something is reality or a dream or not.”

There was a bit of a trick to it, since if you thought you were in pain you would feel it even in a dream. There were the super-realistic dreams like the one I had when attacked by a Succubus. Unfortunately, since I didn’t have my ring Succubus here with me, I had to figure out this was a dream on my own.

“Okay. Now that you mention it, this does feel a lot like a dream. Looks like we need to kiss, Keima.”

“Right. Wait, why?”

“I mean, this is a dream, right? Just obey my orders. Normally you’d kiss me all over my body, and especially my feet. But let’s start with my mouth here. Go, go, go.” Rokuko puckered her lips to prepare for a kiss.

“Rokuko... Is that usually what you dream about?”

“Wait, Keima. Isn’t this a dream? Didn’t you say this was a dream?!” Rokuko turned crimson and started smacking the mattress. Cute.

“Hold on a second. Rokuko, are you the real thing?”

“Why are you even asking that? Obviously I am. Do you think there’s a fake me running around?”

“...I mean, if this is my dream, it wouldn’t be weird for there to be a dream Rokuko.”

“I’m the real thing! I remember crossing the line with you, Keima. We poured energy into a Dungeon Core that Father gave us while kissing, and... Wait. There’s obviously no Dungeon Cores here...”

“Seems like you are the real thing. Your memories are clearly different from mine.”

Dreams wouldn’t have inconsistencies like that... and if they did, you wouldn’t really notice them in the dream. That held true even when one was lucid dreaming, which was the state of dreaming while being aware it’s a dream. In which case, it was highly likely that this was a dream that wasn’t actually a dream.

“Got it. This is a psychological attack from the pope.”

“Wait, a psychological attack?”

“Isn’t it a pretty common trope to freeze someone in place by making them have happy dreams?”

“That happens enough to be a trope...?”

Really, given how he controlled the priests at the trial, the pope was probably skilled in brainwashing and psychological attacks. They didn’t do damage despite being attacks, so this happy dream thing had probably slid right through Rokufa-ko’s angel defenses. It was like Restoration magic.

“Did I get sent in since it was an area-of-effect thing? Pretty lazy. Thanks to that, we saw through it right away.”

“A happy dream, hm? I really am happy to be with you, Keima,” Rokuko said, looking my way. “But Niku, Ichika, the monster girls... and our cute daughter Soto. None of them are here. And we were in the middle of renovating the dungeon, remember? I’m the [Cave of Greed], this little dream is way too little to satisfy me!”

“Haha, well said. That’s what makes you my partner.”

And with that settled, we just had to smash through the attack.

“...Okay, I understand the situation,” Rokuko said. “So what do we do?”

“Nothing fancy to it. We just gotta wake up. We do it every morning; what’s the problem?”

“Every afternoon for you, Keima,” Rokuko said with a giggle. The world blurred, and began falling apart...

* * *

My consciousness rose to the surface. In front of me was the skeleton pope. Apparently I had returned to reality.

But we were not in the Boss Room we had been in. There was a black sphere... Meaning we were in the room with the artificial Dungeon Core. We had apparently been put into glass tubes. There was another glass tube on the opposite side of me, and inside was an unconscious Alca. She had her hands bound above her head just like us.

“Oh, you’ve returned? You could have avoided suffering had you stayed in the {Happiness Prison} and enjoyed your happy dream,” the skeleton pope said, looking at us through the glass tube. “Good grief, to think psychological attacks would work on both angels and Living Armor. Thank you for the valuable data, you two. Also, you have awoken too late. I have already removed the remnants of the God of Light from her,” he said, holding up a divinely shining crystal. “It was a close shave, but she has lost the protection of the gods. I find it unlikely your remaining mana will be enough to cast spells strong enough to destroy the capsules. I will be using the remaining scraps of it for my own purposes as well.”

Now that he mentioned it, I realized that about half of my mana had left my body. That was still more than enough to cast {Element Burst}. It was a combination of bottom-tier spells, after all.

The pope had mistaken my magic attacks for {Judgment Ray}, and that it was Rokufa-ko shooting them. I had cast them chantless for that purpose, after all.

“You are now captured rats. I must now go deal with the rest of you lot, so wait quietly for my return,” the pope said, moving to mess with the slate in front of the artificial Dungeon Core.

But that was him letting his guard down. Time to fuck this skeleton up. Or so I thought, right as Rokufa-ko asked “What next?” through telepathy.

Well, I may be in the perfect position for a surprise attack, but it’d be pretty stupid to just do some kind of basic attack on him when even {Element Burst} didn’t work. Worst-case scenario, I could revive both Narikin and Rokufa, so maybe I should just be a total dick here.

What, then, would be so dickish that it would make me feel like I had won instantly?

“(We’ll wait for an opening then mess with the Dungeon Core. Let’s throw Toi and the priests outside the dungeon so they can expose the pope’s crimes.)”

The pope seemed kind of obsessed with his position, so that would probably do more damage than anything. Faith in him would plummet, and he would lose for sure in the next election.

“(That sounds good! And super fun! But can you do something that specific?)”

“(Judging by how he’s fiddling with that panel, it’s probably not much different from the artificial dungeon I learned to use.)” In the first place, the slates were kind of like simplified menus. I could handle it.

“(Also, shouldn’t you save the High Priestess?)”

“(She has a skill to revive, she’ll be fine.)” Really, it’d probably be faster just to kill her. She would just revive at some altar or another.

On second thought, I can probably guess why the High Priestess was the only one kept separate. If she died she’d revive outside the dungeon, so he couldn’t risk killing her.

“(Sooo, putting aside how you’ll control it, how will you even get the pope away from the panel?)”

“(Hopefully there’s something we can do to distract him.)”

“(Mhm. Maybe we could just summon a monster with DP?)”

That was one option, but a normal old monster would just be obliterated instantly with the pope’s magic. A monster that could survive would be... Wait, hold on.

“(It’s a bit of a gamble, but I just thought of something good... Let’s split into two for a second, Rokuko.)”

Pope’s Perspective

Things had looked spotty for a moment, but everything had paid off in the end.

The shining crystal before the pope was radiant with energy from the God of Light himself. If he thrust this before them, even apostles of light would be forced to kneel before him. Even the captured angel would be useful for his further research. The pope couldn’t help but cackle, his face bones chattering.

On top of that, the High Priestess was in the palm of his hands, and the rest of the priests were in this dungeon. He could neatly kill them, revive them as fresh Zombies, and then regain his status as a trusted pope.

Perhaps he should say that henceforth one needed to undergo a special ritual to become an archpriest, and thereby turn all archpriests into Zombies. That way they couldn't defy him. He would allow them free will as long as it was not problematic to do so.

"Still, what is with this dungeon? Did Alca truly determine it would be impossible to conquer?"

Although the group Magni was leading did have Ragil's assassin and Narikin's servant, the group of priests had suffered almost no harm whatsoever. In fact, it felt like this was a tutorial dungeon, more than anything.

"Why would a dungeon of this level be known as the most evil of all? I suppose I shall raise the difficulty," the pope said, moving to modify the dungeon. When suddenly... He heard a crack.

"Hrm?"

The pope turned, and saw cracks forming in the capsule containing the angel. But how? The pope had thoroughly and carefully layered defensive magic into the capsule; it wouldn't break from any old attack. One would need to use King-tier magic such as {Judgment Ray} to do that... How?

It was then that the pope noticed something.

"Wait... Where did your mana-sucking cuffs go?!"

"Ahaha, I broke them! As you can see!"

A second later, the capsule shattered. The barriers broke and fell to pieces. A beam of light shot at the pope, who reflexively parried it with his staff.

The angel, previously chained, grinned. A closer look revealed the cuffs on the ground, cleanly split in half as if cut by something exceptionally sharp.

"Impossible, those were made of adamantite! How could you cut them so cleanly?!"

"How do you think? You can see it for yourself!" the angel exclaimed, coming swinging with a knife she had hidden. He blocked it with his staff... and shifted to dodging just as his staff was cut in half. Its remnants clattered onto the ground. He had evaded it, but a bit of bone on his right arm had been cut off.

He used {Undead Heal} to repair his wounds.

“To think you could surpass my defenses... That must be an orichalcum blade. You wield a divine blade created by a god? How irritating.”

“Eheh, I can fight up close, too,” the angel said, wielding her knife and closing the difference between them. Her aura changed, as if she had begun to focus, and a merciless killing intent shot to the pope.

“That said, I have no reason to play along with this. Return to sleep... Hrm?”

The pope snapped his finger and cast {Happiness Prison}, but the angel showed no signs of slowing. Even though it had worked moments ago.

“You have already devised a counter? This is why I hate the God of Light’s subordinates. Regardless, I will just have to physically imprison you now. {Rock Bind}.”

Tentacles of rock sped toward the angel. She dodged them swiftly, cutting them down as they came. But more tentacles were born from the crumbling stone wreckage.

“More {Rock Bind}, {Rock Bind}. And how about some more {Rock Bind},” the pope said, launching out the spells without any chants. Stone surrounded the angel from literally all sides, and naturally she was captured.

“Good grief, what a handful.”

The pope stole the knife from the angel and looked it over. It seemed the blade was made of orichalcum, with everything else being iron. The bits between it seemed to be a fusion of orichalcum and iron, which was rare. The pope moved to stash it away, but suddenly it disappeared.

“This could not be made with human hands... Once again they used the power of the gods.”

It was made of orichalcum, and could disappear in an instant. Both smacked of divinity. The pope glared at the lingering light of the knife with narrowed bone holes.

And then he felt a wave of nausea.

He looked at the angel, thinking she had done something, but she was limp

and unmoving, as if unconscious.

“What was that...? Hrm?!”

He looked around, and saw something unbelievable. The capsule with High Priestess Alca inside had been destroyed from within. And as for Alca herself... She was fiddling with the console of the artificial Core.

“Impossible! But how?! No, how did you regain consciousness?!”

Alca had been put to sleep not with {Happiness Prison}, but another spell—a more involved one, which reset one’s mind to a blank slate. {Innocent Cradle} returned one’s soul to that of an innocent babe, and he was certain it was still under effect...

“Oh, finally noticed me, huh?” he said.

“Get away from that, Alca! {Ten Gravi—}... Tch!”

He couldn’t kill Alca. If he did, she would revive at her shrine—outside of the dungeon.

“What did you do, Alca?”

“What can I say? Something pretty fun, let’s leave it at that,” she said, speaking with an expression and tone the pope had never heard before. It was entirely like she was someone else.

“...Ah! I see, {Possession}! Is that you, Narikin?!”

“Nice guess, pope.”

Alca... No. Narikin, possessing Alca, grinned.

Keima’s Perspective

What I did was simple. I had Rokufa-ko serve as a distraction while using the opportunity to possess the unconscious Alca.

However, it was actually Niku moving Rokufa’s body. If the mind controlling the body went unconscious, one only had to control it with another mind from farther away. It was just like controlling the Golems and rabbits. And if that failed, our backup plan was for Rei to overwrite the possession.

The knife that disappeared at the perfect timing was made with Soto's {Teensy Recreation}. She could make things disappear at will without an hour needing to pass. She was probably watching the monitor from behind Niku right about now.

But yeah, while the decoy was going nuts, I got Alca out of her capsule. Then I managed to evade detection while spitting Magni and the others out of the dungeon.

The decoy was doing so well I even had the time to move this control room to the surface. When rising up I felt a bit like I was riding an elevator.

“(Keima, I’m finished. You can do what you want now.)”

“(Good work. Head on home now.)”

“(Don’t do anything weird to the High Priestess’s body, okay? Remember that Soto’s watching.)”

“(I obviously would never.)”

With that, Rokuko stopped possessing Rokufa and went back to her own body. Now the only moving parts in the room were Alca (me) and the pope. It didn’t matter if anyone died here. Alca would revive, and we could revive the two monsters with DP. It was hard to say whether Narikin could even die to begin with. Which meant we won. The only question was whether we could make it a perfect victory by returning home safe?

Also, Alca’s body was something else. She could already move around fine, even though her mana had been sucked while she was imprisoned. She probably had a bunch of autoheal skills on, but she still had enough mana for me to blast out a ton of {Element Bursts} while it was in the process of being sucked out. She probably had a bunch of resistances that activated right before death, too.

“It’s over, pope. How does it feel to let go of the power you’ve stacked up over years of effort?”

“You... You BASTAAAARD! I’ll kill you!” The pope’s skeletal face twisted with rage, and he stabbed Narikin’s body with the jagged top half of his staff. However, Narikin was a Living Armor, and coated in orichalcum, too. Despite his

rage, he could not even scratch him. Thanks to Rokufa's armor skill, he couldn't even scrape some paint off.

"(Ghostlore)! {Darkbomb}! {Gravity Vortex}!"

"Ahahah! It's all pointless! You'll never be able to kill me with that."

Even when he launched all the magic he had, the orichalcum-coated armor didn't budge. Rokufa was safe on the inside, too. I had to be impressed with my own sturdiness.

But anyway, after buying some time, I glanced back at the artificial Core's console. We were almost on the surface.

"Mm... Whoa now."

I shook on my feet. That was probably Alca's consciousness trying to surface and push through the possession; I felt a lot of resistance.

"...{Thunder Break}!"

The pope's body scraped my (Alca's) body.

"Whoa, that was close. You trying to kill me?"

"I tire of this. I care not for what happens here. It will be more efficient to just collapse the dungeon and bury you alive!"

I turned around and saw that the black Dungeon Core was cracking like a melon. Uh oh.

"It's too late! Be buried alive forever!"

"As if I'll... Ngh!"

The pope came thrusting with his broken staff, but I couldn't move; all I could do was watch while stuck in place.

The pope repeatedly stabbed the cracked Core. Black smoke began pouring out of the cracks.

"Haha! You shall regret ever defying me as you sink to the bottoms of the earth...! Ngh?!" The pope suddenly clutched his chest. The black smoke was enveloping him.

“Ah, ngh?! B-But why, this shouldn’t be... The control should not be happening to me... Nghaah?! Is this the God of Light’s lingering power?! It’s multiplying... Nggghh!” The pope tried tossing the crystal aside, but it was stuck to his hand. The black smoke was being sucked into it, the black core increasingly losing its color and becoming transparent. “Th-This cannot be... This is... graaaaah!”

“Uh? Are you alright...? Ngh!” My body reacted hard as well, bringing me to my knees.

“Nghaa, oh, ngh, i-in the depths, o-of my mind, are memories of distant lands! {Teleport}!”

The cloud-enshrouded pope disappeared into a teleportation circle... And in that moment, the now-clear core shattered, with the monitor cutting off as if out of electricity. Both of my possessions were forcibly canceled at once.

Epilogue

Narikin's Perspective

Beneath the blue sky, priests were singing their praises to the sun. They had been locked in a horrifying dungeon declared impossible to conquer by the High Priestess herself, but out of nowhere they had been spat out onto the surface.

"Pup. This is mama's doing, correct?" Hugo asked Toi, who was still holding the birdcage.

"Yes, I do believe so, though I do not understand what perverse mind one must have to call my lord 'mama,'" she replied. He would be truly an exceptional man if not for his obsession with Keima but that, too, was thanks to Master's immense charisma, Tran (Narikin) concluded with a nod.

"This is... the church. Though part of it's been destroyed," Hugo continued.

"We seemed to not have been moved as far as we thought."

"Yeah. Now, pup. I'm gonna go under the church and get the Divine Nightcap for mama. It's far from the areas that've been destroyed, and right now I can use the chaos as cover. While I'm gone, extol the virtues of mama's accomplishments to everyone."

"A brilliant suggestion. My lord can acquire his cap stealthily in the confusion, or even perhaps use this accomplishment to gain enough authority to own it legally," Toi said. Once they had it in their hands, they could flex to handle either situation.

Tran nodded as well, impressed by Toi's acumen... When suddenly, his possession ended. His vision went from the blue sky, to a murky laboratory-looking room with a floor covered by shards of glass.

"(Hrm?! Is this my body? It seems Rokufa is wearing me. Where did Master go...? And what are these rocks? They are in the way.)"

Narikin brushed aside the {Rock Bind} remnants with hardly a second thought.

The orichalcum coating gave him absurd strength, and rock without mana backup was nothing.

“This is... Oh, dear?”

“(Rokufa? Was your possession canceled, too, then?)”

“...You, too, Narikin? Does that broken crystal have something to do with it?” Rokufa asked, just as the room began to creak and shake.

“(Master and Rokuko must have done something. As we cannot contact them, then we have no choice but to remain on guard... Incidentally, Rokufa. Is that not the High Priestess on the ground?)”

A glance showed Alca sprawled out on the ground near the shattered crystal.

“So it seems. Shall we rescue her...?”

“(Yes. She has been of great help to us, after all.)”

They approached the collapsed Alca... and the ceiling began crumbling down on top of them.

“Look out!” Rokufa flew over, using her body to block the falling ceiling. She protected Alca with Narikin’s defenses, and ended up straddling Alca’s body on all fours.

“Nnn... R-Rokufa...”

“(Hrm, have you awoken, High Priestess?)”

“Ah, telepathy... Yes, Lord Narikin. Thanks to you two, I was saved.”

Rokufa nodded, then glanced up. “Oh, darling. It seems we can see outside now that the ceiling has collapsed. There is hardly any point in staying here, so let us all go outside.”

“(Indeed. If you’ll excuse me, High Priestess. Please hold on to me.)”

“Er, r-right, yes...!”

They picked up Alca with both arms in what would commonly be known as a princess carry. Rokufa spread out her wings then flew into the air, aiming for the now-visible sky.

“W-We’re flying! We’re flying, Lord Narikin, Lady Rokufa!”

“What about it?”

“(Hold tight so you do not fall.)”

“Y-Yes!”

Alca clung tightly to Rokufa. Perhaps due to her mind having been on the verge of being reset, she was acting as innocent as a young girl experiencing her first romance, and thanks in part to the danger, her heart was pounding faster and harder than a chihuahua’s. It seemed like she was seeing Narikin in an entirely new light somehow.

“Oh. It seems that we will be able to reunite with Toi and the others immediately,” Rokufa said, and indeed the priests were directly below them. A corner of the church had collapsed, leaving a plaza. She flew there with Alca.

“Alca! You and the others are safe, too!” Magni exclaimed.

“My lord, it is good to see you safe.”

Magni and Toi welcomed them with broad smiles. Narikin split from Rokufa the second they let Alca down, in what looked like Narikin spitting Rokufa out from inside of him.

“Boy, what’s the deal with all that? I can’t say I’ve seen someone who turns into armor before.”

“It is the power of my wife. Incredible, is it not?”

“The power of an angel, huh? That makes it a miracle, and I’m just gonna stop thinking about it now,” Magni said, then continued. “So, what happened to the pope?”

Narikin hadn’t seen that. All he knew was that he had been gone when he woke up, so he stayed silent and shook his head to indicate he didn’t know.

“I see. In that case, we’ll need to elect a new pope,” Magni said, glancing Narikin’s way.

“A new pope... Yes, I suppose that would be fitting.”

“Indeed, but I hope we have someone fit for the job here. Don’t you agree,

my boy?” Magni asked, staring at Narikin closely.

“That I do. Hopefully someone here is fit for the job.”

“Don’t you agree, my boy?” Magni repeated, slapping his back.

“Hrm? Am I missing something?”

“Boy, how about you be the pope?”

“Hrm?”

Magni finally just asked it outright. Narikin tilted his head, not understanding. What did it mean to be the pope? Was it from an idiom...? He couldn’t think of one like that. Was it literal, then?

“You wish for me to be the pope?”

“That’s what I’m saying. You sure are innocent.”

“Apologies, I am just unsettled by all of this. Erm... Toi, what do you think?”

“Um? You are truly going to ask me that, my lord? Ah, well... I suppose you can do it if you want?”

“Hrm.”

Narikin put a hand on his chin. The status of pope was quite significant indeed. In which case, would it not be perfect for gathering information?”

“(Narikin, Narikin. I just realized something amazing.)”

“(What is it, Rokufa? What did you realize?)”

“(If you become the pope, we’ll finish our job to find the pope’s true identity!)”

“(Ah...! I see, because his true identity will become me! Goodness, what a clever wife I have.)”

A wondrous realization indeed. And no doubt becoming the pope would be highly useful to Master. Narikin nodded. Magni, having not heard the telepathic conversation, took that as a wise nod following much hard thinking.

“Very well. I will become pope. What must I do?”

“Oh, you’ve settled? You sure are a good man... Alca! You know what to do!”

“R-Right!” Alca stepped forward and raised her voice. “Due to the absence of the pope, I hereby announce the beginning of a new election with all the priests gathered here! I, Alca Rue Bipolar Red, ask all of you this. Does anyone oppose this man, Narikin, being selected as the next pope?!”

Narikin had fought the undead pope, destroyed the dungeon, saved them and the High Priestess, was on friendly terms with the God of Light, and was married to an angel. If he was not fit to be pope, who was? Magni was the next best pick, and even she was pushing for Narikin.

There was not a single priest who voted nay.

* * *

“...And so, Narikin became the pope.”

“Excuse me?” Haku asked. We were having one of our regularly scheduled tea party report sessions. I explained the details to Haku, and she replied with a clear lack of understanding, which was pretty fair. It was hard to grasp all that had happened.

The dungeon collapsing had broken the possession. I waited half a day for the function to return, recalling how something similar had happened the last time we destroyed an artificial dungeon, and when I finally got back in contact, Narikin had become the pope.

“...Do you understand how I felt when he said to me, ‘Thus, you may report that the pope’s true identity is me’?”

“I believe I do. ‘Are you stupid?’ is the wording I would use, perhaps.”

“Exactly. That said, he’s been progressing the investigation quickly. He’s currently having them make a map made with all the artificial dungeons and production plants listed. He said he might be able to get every kind of dungeon seed currently available. They also have a Dungeon Eater on hand.”

“This seems to have surpassed being an investigation, and become just you taking control of the Holy Kingdom in general, no? What in the world are you doing?”

“Sorry, it just kind of happened.”

Haku was cradling her head. I understood how she felt; I really did. I had done the same when I heard. Also, they got the Divine Nightcap for me, too, so uh, yeah.

“Even the Divine Bedding... Oh, does that not mean you have all seven now?”

“Yep. I’ll have them all if you lend me the mattress and pillow.”

“I will write the letter as part of your payment,” Haku said with a sigh. Furthermore, regarding the pope... Or former pope, rather, I confirmed from the bare face that Rokuko showed me that he is unmistakably Core 10.”

“Alright.”

“Thus, I will soon prepare a Dungeon Battle against Core 10. I will crush him thoroughly, putting him either out of commission forever, or hopefully crushing his Core directly. I considered having you join me as a faction member, but... Given all you have accomplished here, I would struggle to pay you if you did anything more, so please do not participate under any circumstance.”

“Er... What? You’re going to have a Dungeon Battle with Core 10?” I blinked. Sure, don’t ask me to join, but still. And her plan was to either beat him to the point where he couldn’t recover, or explicitly destroy his Core? That’s pretty violent.

“But of course. The artificial dungeons and Dungeon Eaters are clear betrayals to Father. Hardly forgivable,” Haku said. For a second I was confused, thinking we were the traitor faction ourselves, but something hit me as Haku took a sip of tea to calm herself.

“Er, does the name ‘Traitor Faction’ mean that we’re the ones who eliminate the traitors?”

“Oh? Did I never say? That is more or less correct.”

...No, you didn’t!

Rokuko, meanwhile, gave an exaggerated shrug, as if bemused I hadn’t realized by now. “Don’t be dumb, Keima. Haku would obviously never betray Father.”

“You knew, Rokuko?!”

“Why would Haku betray Father when they’re clearly on such good terms?”

But, I mean, everyone calls her traitor! Even Ittetsu did!

“I have others call me traitor on purpose. There are surprisingly many traitorous fools who ask to join me due to that. Convenient, no?” Haku said with a bright smile.

It seemed Haku Laverio’s modus operandi was to beat down the actual traitors who rebelled against Father until they couldn’t function properly, then send her homegrown Heroes to land the finishing blow. The dead couldn’t talk, and the traitorous Cores were killed by Heroes, so only Haku was left to build up a bad reputation for arranging it all.

“Okay, I understand everything now. Didn’t realize it went that deep.”

“Only a few know this much. Do not go spreading it around much, please.”

“Right.”

If not even Core 112 knew, then this must have been a plan she set in motion long ago. But either way, at least this meant we wouldn’t have to fight Father one day.

“Oh, and yes. Could I borrow Ichika for three days?” Haku asked.

“Ichika? Why?”

“To earn money. I have been paying you out of my personal funds up until now, but this incident is so large in scale I do not know what amount of money would suffice. Thus, I plan to hold gambling races in the capital as well, and continually give you a portion of the profits. I would like Ichika to instruct me on the know-how for it all.”

Aaah... Okay, yeah. Ichika would be the best person for that job.

“Things will differ a bit as I plan to have monsters race instead, but I expect her advice to prove invaluable nonetheless. How does thirty golds sound?”

“Starting up a whole business just to pay Keima is pretty funny,” Rokuko said with a giggle.

“It is a necessary investment. If I do use monsters, I will be able to entrust a

portion of the management to House Orkluv, which will be rather convenient. Their Lord Dain is a tamer, and I can have him send the mattress in return for this job.”

Apparently it was convenient in many ways. Haku wouldn’t treat Ichika poorly or anything, so this seemed safe to me.

And most importantly, this is passive income! Passive income! PASSIVE INCOME!!!

“Alright, you can have her.”

“I’ll get the shifts ready,” Rokuko said. “But remember, it’s just for three days, sister!”

“Yes, thank you. You may use Dolce to fill in the gaps.”

And so I lent Ichika out for thirty golds, with Dolce planning to take her place. *Work hard, Ichika! It’s all so we can have some sweet passive income!*

Ichika’s Perspective

Ichika came to work at the imperial capital as instructed. She speedily did a day’s work, then went to report directly to Haku. In her hand was a report summarizing the know-how for the races.

“Lady Haku, I’m here with my super-duper-normal report,” she called out.

“Excellent work; I shall take the report. Incidentally... How is the town?”

“Don’t worry, girl, what you’re scared of hasn’t happened. Rokuko’s pawing at his pants, but Master’s protecting his virginity like nothing else. He won’t touch her till you say the word, Lady Haku.”

Haku nodded to herself. “That’s the spirit. I suppose my glare will keep him in check for the next hundred years or so, at the very least.”

“Nah, that’s too cruel for Rokuko. Girl’s gotta quench her thirst. And aren’t you gonna have to pull Dolce and the others out since the excuse about Holy Kingdom assassins won’t fly anymore?” Ichika said with some exasperated shakes of her head.

“You jest. Now, let us move onto the next stage of your report. I have high hopes for something incredible, as I went out of my way to put up an excuse for summoning you. Don’t let me down, oh Infiltration Captain Sorin of the Imperial Spy Division,” Haku said, reaching out to Ichika’s neck and popping her slave collar off.

“I go by Ichika now. But you got it... Master’s secrets are your secrets,” Ichika said, popping her neck out. It had been too long since she was free.



Afterword

It's me, Onikage Supana, the writer known for being a fan of Hololive. This is Volume 16. *LDM* has come this far thanks to all of your support. But shore up your resolve; next up is the final volume! Thus, I have been putting in the work to resolve all my foreshadowing and mysteries. Volume 16 had a lot, but before I go into it, a spoiler warning for those who read the afterword first.

Okay. This volume leaped straight into invading the Holy Kingdom. You could call this the Holy Kingdom arc, but in truth it's not actually finished in the web novel (at the time of my writing this), so I started to prioritize writing the LN. Though to complicate matters, the plot is really different in the LN by this point, and my head is a mess trying to keep it all in order. I ended up needing to post updates only once a week for the WN to give myself time to keep things straight. From this point on, I'll be doing a bit of backporting to the WN, so it'll be kind of a reverse-novelization where the online version gets the print version's text.

I had the idea for them going on a trip while possessing Narikin and Rokufa while thinking about what I could do to have Keima and Rokuko flirt a lot, which led to me realizing that if they used different bodies, Rokuko could remain pure, and thus Haku would narrowly allow it. Though naturally, if he went all the way with Rokufa, Rokuko's reactions back home would make it obvious, and Haku would learn about it. Let's keep it family-friendly!

Hugo, a character not in the WN, returns in this volume. I had been planning ever since Volume 7 for them to meet up in the Holy Kingdom after Keima sent him off to look for the Divine Bedding. He's a muscle muscle macho man. And unfortunately for him, he did not get to meet up with Succuma. I wanted to have an illustration for Keima turning into a girl in return, but we had adult circumstances where there was no time to design a female Keima. Drat, and I wanted to see Youta-san's interpretation of female Keima.

As for Core 10, this is his first time showing up since Volume 5. I was finally

able to reveal that the Holy Kingdom was actually led by an undead. He's a Dungeon Core specializing in magic, and after five hundred years of honing his abilities he's better at magic than any other Dungeon Core. Unfortunately, he's struggled with a simple complex over having a two-digit name. Haku seems to be preparing to launch a war against his home base, which may be shown in Volume 17.

Incidentally, the fake epilogue was spelled a bit differently, along with some different hints. This was my editor I-san's idea. I like this kind of minor detail. Did anyone notice? Did anyone think it was the actual epilogue? Got you. The actual epilogue was pretty packed, due to my page count quota.

I got the name {Happiness Prison} from a certain forum poster. Thank you J-san, Vengeance Is Mine! (That's a joke.)

Also, yeah, this volume just flat out had a ton of pages. I ended up writing about twice as much as I needed to... One side story I had written involved Soto and the monster girls using possession to follow Narikin and Rokufa's Holy Kingdom date. I thought it would be fun in the sense of a family trip, but I had already exceeded how many pages I could use, so unfortunately it was cut. Really, I've been thinking about how I don't even need extra episodes when enough of it is already newly written content...

As for the cover art, I had hoped to put Kinue for this one, but unfortunately it couldn't happen due to her lack of involvement. She's a Silky that generally can't leave home, and she has basically no involvement in the Holy Kingdom arc. Kinue is someone who helps from the shadows, and perhaps not being put front and center is part of her pride as a maid. I honestly do get the feeling she works the most out of any of the three monster girls. She works tirelessly at the inn with almost no breaks. The inn really wouldn't function without her.

...Anyway, I'm running out of afterword space. I had a lot to say this time. I wonder how many pages the next volume's will be? I'd like to write quite a bit, since it's the final part of the final volume, but I have no idea, since the hidden purpose of using afterwords is to fill in extra pages. Maybe I'll have the chance to put in another minigame? Hopefully they let that happen. Also, the puzzle from last time was a picture of Rokuko from the first volume's cover art. It has a place close to my heart, since it was my first cover art! But yeah, bye for now.

See you in the next afterword.

Onikage Supana

Bonus Short Stories

Kinue and Gacha

Kinue didn't have much to do while Keima and the others were investigating the Holy Kingdom.

Well, she did have her job. She had her daily work in the inn, and it was her responsibility to implement her gimmick ideas in the dungeon. However... All that second part involved was her teaching recipes to the Cook Golems. Problem was, the Golems learned so fast she finished her job almost instantly.

She thought about teaching them to clean up after the customers, too, but if she did that, she would be diminishing her workload in the future—that is, her responsibility to keep the dungeon clean—so she gave up on the idea. Kinue had the maturity to resist immediate gratification in favor of long-term satisfaction.

And so, Kinue didn't have much to do, relatively speaking.

"Now, what to do...?" she asked herself.

Incidentally, Rei—leader of the three monster girls—was honing the visual design of her [Gate of Splendor] to perfection, which led to Keima saying she could make it herself. As one could imagine, she was quite pumped up about having been entrusted with work. Kinue was jealous; since a visual design could never truly be perfected, Rei could continue serving Master endlessly in the most literal sense. That said, Kinue *did* consider it a source of pride to finish her work speedily.

"Oooh? Kinue, are you freeeee?" came a voice as Kinue was going through books in the staff break room. It was Neruneh. Due to adult circumstances, she did not have a gimmick that she needed to add to the dungeon. However, even without that, it was her job to make the magic tools drop from monsters in the dungeon.

“Yes. It is not that I am lacking work, but, well... Do not think that I am dissatisfied with the work I do have, either. I simply have an excess of time. I... do understand this is a silly concern to have.”

“It’s fiiine, I understaaand. It’s called a ruuut,” Neruneh said, nodding to herself.

“Neruneh, what is a rut?”

“Ummmm, it’s liiiike, clear on your face that your life is unchanging and you’re starting to find it unsatisfyiing, I gueeeess?”

“Ah. Yes, that is fairly accurate.” Kinue understood her situation once Neruneh put it into words.

“It’s all because of the work we had the other daaaay, now you’re not satisfied with your normal worklooad.”

“Hrm, hrm, hrm, this is problematic indeed. To think a Silky of all beings would develop a taste for excess and comfort...”

It was then that Neruneh clapped her hands together. “Okaaay! Why not play the gacha, theeen?”

“Hm? The gacha...? As in the DP gacha within the DP menu?”

“That’s the ooone. When one wants chaaange, nothing’s better than gachaaa! Rokuko changed her life after summoning Master, remembeer?”

In short, playing the gacha to benefit the future was, without a doubt, the right thing for a dungeon monster to do. Luckily, Kinue had authority to use DP, which meant she could roll the gacha. She received plenty of DP as pay for her services and would not sweat at all from rolling the 1,000 DP gacha.

“Though I will have to look after a monster if one is summoned,” Kinue mused.

“Wouldn’t that just give you more wooork, which is what you waaant?”

“Ah...! Indeed! You truly are smart, Neruneh.”

“Eheheh, Master and my teacher are teaching me a looooot!”

“Hopefully something does come out that changes things,” Kinue said. She

thanked Neruneh, who was puffing her chest out proudly, and proceeded to roll the gacha.

A magic circle bloomed, then constricted. From it popped out a scroll.

“That’s a skill scroll, I thiink? What spell is iiiit?”

“It is not necessarily a spell, you know... Oh, and it is not a skill scroll either. It’s a recipe, perhaps?”

It was a recipe written on a used-up skill scroll. The meal it described was emergency food for adventurers—the kind of recipe you could buy at the Adventurer’s Guild.

“...Ah! This recipe uses Jellies, the dungeon monsters. I had completely forgotten that those could be eaten.”

“Oooh, perfeect.”

“Yes, this will allow me to broaden my cooking. I see, Jellies can be dried to improve mouthfeel... Use weights to squeeze out water... Ohoho, this is not bad at all...”

Kinue carefully looked over the recipe. With this, she would have more recipes to teach the Golems. After all, Master hadn’t said to only teach them one thing!

“This is a truly good recipe, which will allow me to add variety to the inn meals. Thank you, Neruneh. You have given more things to do.”

“It’s fiiine. If you want to thank me, help with some experimeents. I’ve been really curious about your {Chef} skill and everythiing. That uses space-time magic, riiight?”

“Certainly, I will help,” Kinue said with a broad smile.

And so, the Cook Golems got a broader repertoire. The gimmick was that the invaders would be made to wait after giving their orders, so extra work would mean stalling the adventurers for longer... Well, whether that came to pass or not is another story.

About Soto’s Sock Fetish

Keima and Rokuko had a daughter named Soto. This daughter loved socks without discrimination; she loved men and women's socks equally. But her favorite socks were none other than Kinue's, taken off right after a long day of work!

"Ah, Kinue, your socks really are the best! You're a hard worker that loves cleanliness but never uses {Purification}, and that makes your socks top-tier! Your once pure-white socks are now stained with the filth of your soles and have the dampness and smell of your actual feet ingrained in them! It's like your whole day is compressed into them! Geheheheheheh."

"I-I see..."

And so, once again, Soto had barged into Kinue's room after she finished work and praised her freshly removed socks. In front of her. Basically, Soto was analyzing the socks Kinue had taken off and put in her laundry basket.

"It is somewhat embarrassing for you to stare at them like that... What exactly is going on here?"

"Papa said I can't touch your socks without permission from both of you, so I have no choice but to watch from afar like this! Please direct your complaints to papa."

Soto apparently believed she was following her parents' rules. Kinue didn't want to be rude to Master's daughter, but one had to question whether she was actually following them or not.

"You truly do love feet like Master does, Soto."

"Whoa, whoa, hold up, Kinue! I don't love *feet*, I love *socks*. Don't confuse them!"

"I-Is that so?"

"It is so!"

This was an incredibly important point to Soto: she did not care for feet themselves like Keima did. Kinue did not understand the difference at all.

"Of course, I am concerned with whose feet wore them, and I certainly like feet more than other parts, but to me they exist only to give warmth and

fragrance to socks! They are not the target of my fetish!”

“This feels a bit above me.”

“They are like the wood chips in a barbeque... Or no, like the cellar for wine. To put it in your terms, Kinue, it’s like the difference between a house and its residents?”

Even for Kinue, a house fairy, she didn’t want to clean just any old house. She felt even more enlivened when cleaning the house of someone precious to her.

“All that said, I do not believe it is right for one to enter a maid’s room and fish through her laundry, so I will be reporting this to Master,” Kinue said, smiling with a hand on her cheek.

“Wha?! No fair! You’re going to try and keep these wonderful socks to yourself?!”

“They are my socks, you know. And they are laundry. Not to mention... You just said it yourself: direct complaints to Maser.”

“Ngh! I certainly did! I can’t believe I made this blunder!”

And so, Soto was forbidden from barging into people’s rooms, and as a result Kinue’s socks rose even further in value. And between you and me, it was from this point on that Soto was spotted trying to crawl on the floor and catch glimpses of Kinue’s socks.

Wataru the Hero Being Invited to the Church of Light

This happened a bit before Wataru met Keima and the others. A priest had invited Wataru to the Church of Light.

“Wataru the Hero. I am overjoyed to have been afforded the opportunity to meet you.”

“Right, right... So, you’re from the Holy Kingdom?”

“Indeed! I am an ardent believer in the Church of Light, and while we are reviled by the Laverio Empire, our faith worships the producer of Heroes, the God of Light himself.”

“Right. I did think about dropping by to say hello at some point. The God of Light did, he... Helped me out,” Wataru said with a fake smile, but the priest took that as approval. “By the way, what kind of church is the Church of Light, exactly?”

“Well! We dedicate ourselves to destroying dungeons. Ah, of course, there are many other aspects of our culture. For example, ah... Right, we practice polyamory, and both male and female Heroes can create harems easily. We have a platoon of battle-ready beauties in the form of the High Priestess candidates, and we guarantee all of them to be perfect partners for any Hero.”

“High Priestess candidates?”

“Indeed. Well, they have not become the High Priestess herself, but there can only be one High Priestess, so... Ah, but of course, given your high stature it would not be out of the question for the current High Priestess to bear your child.”

Wataru had expected the church to be highly chaste, so all this harem business was really catching him off guard.

“...I-I see. Well, I suppose some people like that kind of thing.”

“Indeed! For it is humanity’s duty to bear powerful children!”

The priest smiled, thinking his sales talk was going well. Wataru’s fake smile was faltering.

“As a Hero, you are also guaranteed an archpriest status in the church. Ah, how jealous I am. You will even receive five gold a month in pay!”

“Five gold?”

“Indeed, and one gold coin is enough for a second-tier citizen to live for a full year. You would be getting five a month, alongside living arrangements, exemption from taxes, and many other rights! You would also have authority over medpriests and below, so you can promote those you like, and distance those you don’t!”

“Should an outsider like me really have that power?”

“Of course! After all, you are a Hero.”

First women, then money and power. Wataru sighed; it was already clear that the Church of Light was rotten to the core. However, this was taken as a sigh of awe, and the priest continued his sales talk with a grin.

“Right, right. You are even given priority access when it comes to conquering dungeons. It’s wonderful!”

“Priority access for dungeons?”

“Indeed. When dungeons are discovered in our country, we begin to conquer them. While this usually involves much red tape, we have systems in place to allow Heroes to destroy the Dungeon Cores.”

“Heroes?”

“Yes. Heroes were blessed upon destroying Dungeon Cores and awakened to new powers. Thus, you need to fiddle with no red tape whatsoever. You may simply set foot in the dungeon and destroy the Core. It is quite convenient.”

The God of Light certainly had told Wataru that Heroes destroyed dungeons. He also mentioned that he would get more power for doing so.

“However, it’s said that if cities are directly above dungeons, the ground might collapse in itself, which would be dangerous for everyone. What do you do in those cases?”

“Ah, in those cases the country will take full responsibility for the citizens; there is nothing for the Heroes to worry about. The city would be at fault for building in such a place. We build cities near dungeons only after conquering them.”

In other words... They apparently didn’t care what happened to foreign cities, or more specifically, the empire’s cities.

“When conquering dungeons outside of the Holy Kingdom, we ask for permission from the locals, and if granted we can accept them as new citizens of the Holy Kingdom. We pardon them for offering up their dungeon, in other words. Of course, we necessitate that they join the Church of Light, but... If you are concerned about this, you need only ensure you acquire their permission.”

“I see...”

“Oh, but not demihumans. Not demihumans. In particular, beastkin have no fate but to become slaves. They are cursed followers of the God of Chaos, who once bred with beasts,” the priest said, laughing. Wataru had no idea what was funny.

“Now then, Hero. Let us go—to paradise in life, the Holy Kingdom!”

“Uh, no.”

“But why?! Have you not heard all I’ve said?!” the priest shouted in shock.

“You said all the pros, but none of the cons.”

“There are naturally no cons to our divine Church of Light! If you have any problems, we will strive to rectify them! For a Hero, we will do all we can!”

Wataru sighed, since the priest’s response made it hard to tell what flaws were really there. Then, he continued.

“Well, the truth is, I do like beastkin.”

“Th-Then you may buy as many as you like as slaves. You may use them freely as well.”

“Enslaving the people I love?! No way. I wouldn’t be able to bear it. Fix this. You’ll strive to grant my wish, no?”

“Very well, I will hold a conference in the Holy Kingdom about this.”

“I’m talking about freeing all beastkin slaves here. Can you do that?”

“I will remain optimistic.”

“Well, see you when you finish, then,” Wataru said, standing up and figuring that the priest definitely could not. The priest did not follow him.

As for how that ended up, the Holy Kingdom began considering Wataru a fallen Hero corrupted by the empire’s beliefs.

“Well, I gave them a chance, but they were so suspicious I didn’t feel like going.”

“I seeeeee,” Neruneh replied. All of that had just been a topic that came up on one of their dates.

Ask the Maid Chief

There was a famous inn located in the town of Goren, and the maid chef who kept the place running was named Kinue. She supported the inn with her group of cute Silky subordinates, while also serving as the head chef of the inn's cafeteria. One day, someone came before.

"Chief... I want to clean...!"

"You must grow satisfied with things as they are, Hanna."

"But if I give up, then I'll never get to clean!"

"Isn't it nice that everything is clean, Nicole?"

"At this rate, we'll have to unseal the forbidden technique of dirtying things so we can clean up after ourselves..."

"If you do that you will be forbidden from cleaning for a week, Pio."

In reality, it was all of the Silkies. They bemoaned that their greedy superior was stealing all the work, and tried discussing things with that very superior... And by discussing, I mean raging.

"This is tyranny! We must stand against it! Right, Nicole?"

"We'll never stop until things improve! We'll work overnight for free, no overtime! Right, Pio?"

"Um, but isn't constantly working like a betrayal to Master? The pope of Beddhism? Tell them, chief."

"Indeed. Staying up all night and working overtime are sinful, evil things to do. Master will scold you all."

There was no going against Master. And so, the day ended in failure for the Silkies.

Then came the next day. For some reason, Niku went to Kinue.

"I'm... Not growing taller. Though that's good for being a dakimakura," she said.

“Then what is the problem?” Kinue asked, pausing her work to listen.

“It’s bad for fighting. Also, I think being a bit taller would be better for being a dakimakura. Is there something I can do?”

“I once read that eating nutritious foods filled with things such as calcium would help. Also, you will want to eat your vegetables. Try focusing on that.”

“I knew to ask you, Kinue. Mm... Do I have to eat peas?”

“No, if you do not wish to grow.”

“...Please make them tasty.”

And so, Kinue began making hamburgers with peas.

From there, Neruneh consulted her about food she could eat while working, and the nuns asked if she could feed the adventurers foods that would make them more vigorous. Kinue didn’t mind consultations about food, but she got the feeling the nuns were kind of overstepping their bounds there.

“Kinue, can I ask something?”

Her thoughts were interrupted by none other than Rei, the High Priestess of Beddhism.

“Oh, you wish to ask me something, too, Rei? It feels that many people want to consult me about things today.”

“I came because I heard you opened up a consultation office.”

“That is my first time hearing that. Who was saying that?”

“The Silkies.”

“...Oh?”

That solved everything. Kinue planned out her next move while listening to Rei’s consultation about how she had heard about snacks made with blood and wanted to try them out.

The Silkies gathered in a pitch-black room.

“Heheh, once the chief’s so busy with other people’s problems, she’ll have to

share work with us. What a devilish, brilliant plan!”

“The combination of all of our genius! We three sure are smart.”

“Um, Hanna, Nicole? This was pretty much entirely my idea. I would like the full credit here.”

And then, as they were plotting evilly, the door was suddenly thrust open, shining bright light upon them.

“I heard everything. So that is how it is...”

“Geh, the chief maid?!” the three Silkies exclaimed.

“I see you all need a bit of punishment.”

Kinue smiled, but her eyes did not. The Silkies trembled.

And so, Kinue forced the Silkies to take a bit more time off. Subsequently, enough people would start popping up to consult Kinue that she actually did start up a consultation office, but that’s another story.

Soto’s Mail Delivery Service

“You need my help?!”

“Yep. You’re the only one I can count on, Soto. You in?”

“Absolutely positively yes, yes, yes, papa! I’m in!”

And so, Keima trusted Soto with some work. It was simple stuff: delivering letters. But while the job itself was simple—going to a post box and getting letters to deliver to papa in the morning—it was a post box only she could reach. It was an unusual combination of simple yet highly important.

Soto could reach into the {Storage} of Keima’s monster, Narikin, and take out any letters from within. She could also leave less urgent letters in for Narikin to find later. Distance was not an object here; she could even cross country borders. It was an incredibly powerful information tool.

That said, when there were no letters, she had nothing to do.

“Hrm. Nothing, again.”

Despite having finally been given a job, Soto was rotting away with no real work. It was said that no mail was good mail, but most of the time there wasn't even a need for letters thanks to the regular reports. Soto checked twice a day, just leaving if there was nothing. At most she could report to her papa and mama that there were no letters.

"So basically, papa, I'm bored. Write a letter to Narikin or something."

"What's so bad about not having work? You're getting paid the same either way, so..."

"Still! I don't want to get Rei's socks without even doing anything to earn them!"

And yet, she nonetheless kept a firm grip on the socks she had been paid with. As expected of the [Cave of Greed's] daughter, she was very honest with her lust.

"Just do it! I'm trying to help you like an honest and sweet daughter, papa! But this is just dumb work! I want to taste what it's like to be not super helpful, but still appreciably helpful!"

"That's kind of an oddly precise request."

That aside, Soto was being so helpful in other areas that Keima was kind of confused about why she was concerned at all.

"So basically, it's not that you want to do *work*, it's that you want to help because you want to feel like you're doing what we, your parents, are doing?"

"That's right. I want a taste of reality. After all, my birth was very special."

"That's a crazy thought process, wow. Can't you just think of us as parents that don't do much?"

"Listen to your daughter's wishes, papa."

"Fine, fine," Keima said, writing up a letter. "It would, uh... Not satisfy you if I just wrote a pointless letter or sent a blank one, right?"

"Very clever. That's my papa. It would've been perfect if you hadn't felt the need to ask."

“Okay, this’ll take a second, so wait outside. I’ll get it to you sometime today.”

“Yaaay!”

And so, Keima instructed Narikin to report on both unreliable-sounding rumors and less important things. Narikin’s burden increased due to having to stealthily write letters without Toi noticing, but Narikin was happy about having more work, too, so Keima rolled with it.

Incidentally, Soto delivered the blackmail letter from Ragil that Narikin put into his storage to Keima as if it was from Narikin, but, well, that’s another story.









Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Side Chapter — The Battle of the Dog-Eared Loli Maids](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Side Chapter — Narikin and Rokufa's Time Off](#)

[Side Chapter — Soto's Tea Party](#)

[Side Chapter — The High Priestess Alca Puts the Pieces Together](#)

[Side Chapter — Soto Killing Time](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[EPILOGUE](#)

[Epilogue](#)

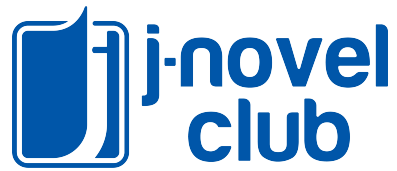
[Afterword](#)

[Bonus Short Stories](#)

[Bonus Textless Illustrations](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)



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Lazy Dungeon Master: Volume 16

by Supana Onikage

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